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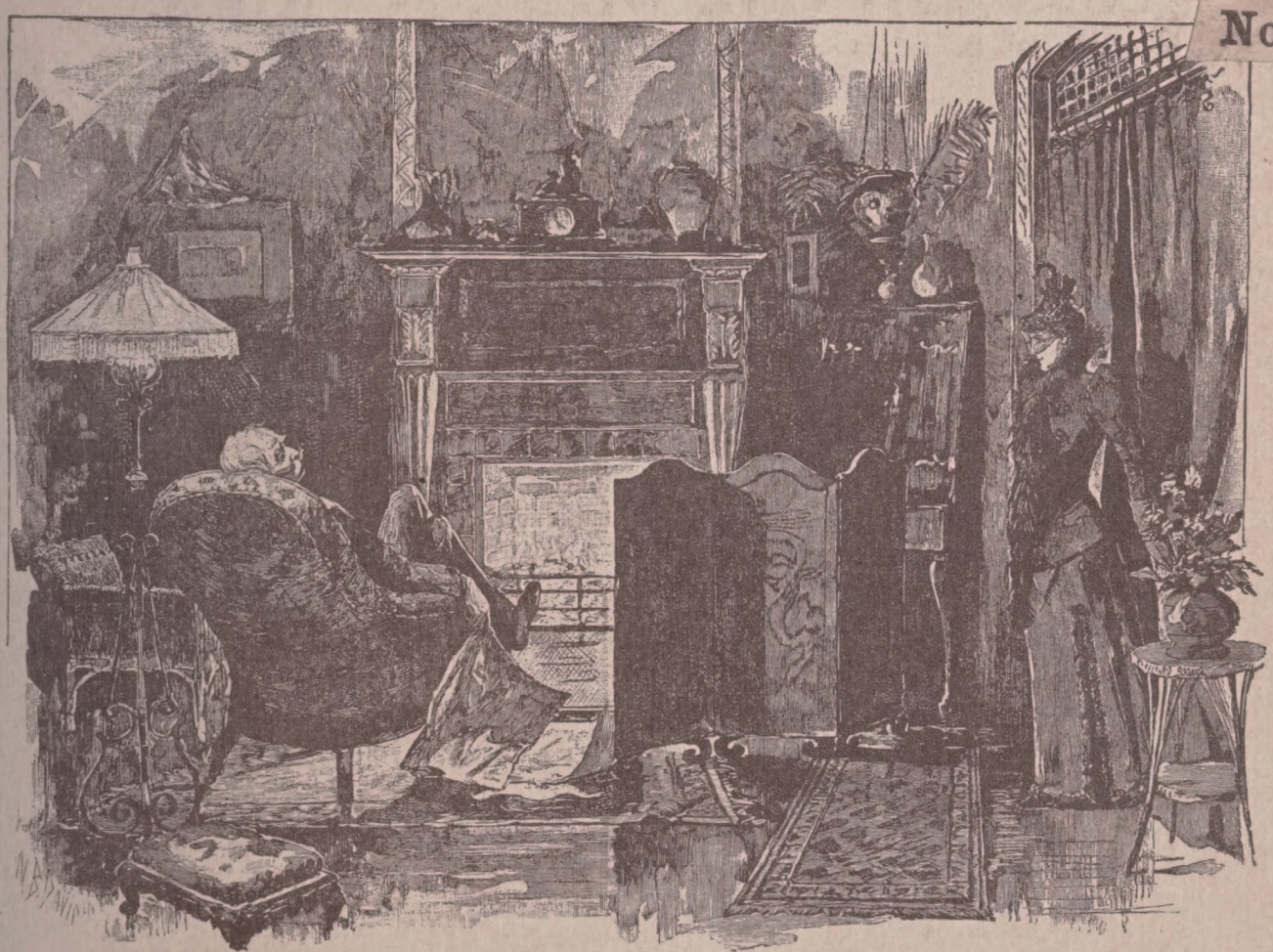

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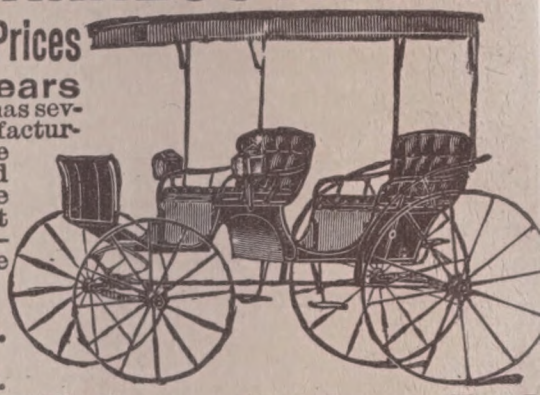

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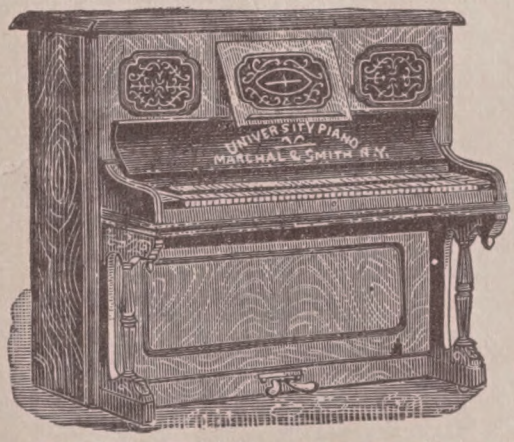

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UNDER A CLOUD.

CHAPTER I.

A LIGHT SNOW-FALL.

ELLO!"

For an instant a shadow fell upon the handsome face of the young man pausing upon the crumbling stone wall, one leg over, the other about to follow, when he uttered this exclamation. A rifle was poised lightly over one broad shoulder, and the blue hunting-suit he wore showed to the best advantage his slender, well-built figure.

"Hello!" was the half-laughing rejoinder, as

another young man appeared in the hollow beyond the wall. A light snow had fallen, and no path was discernible through the scraggy bushes. "Hello, Hilton! You fellows have a fine day for the rabbit-hunt. Bagged anything? Where are the others? It's a deuce of a shame that I couldn't join you, but—" He shrugged his shoulders suggestively, as he held out his hand to the young man on the fence.

For the space of a breath, Hilton did not claim the outstretched hand. There was a peculiar expression in his blue eyes and a sudden compression of the lips under the blonde mustache. Then he laughed half-constrainedly, and accepted the proffered hand.

"Yes, the day *is* fine, Chesney," he replied, with assumed carelessness. "This light snow makes it fine for the rabbits, but the animals themselves—"

Chesney laughed in great amusement.

"After all, Hilton, perhaps the fellow who could not take time for hunting because of a business engagement, is as well off as the fellow

who couldn't hunt because the rabbits wouldn't come out."

Then a swift change came over his face. His eyes, always keen in the presence of this man, were peculiarly so now. A frown marred the frank, good-natured face.

"By George!" he said, with sudden vehemence. "Hilton, you may thank your lucky stars that your business relations do not bring you in contact with such persons as those with whom I have just been. Old Hardman—I told you about him, you remember, when I wrote you fellows sending my regrets—it was with him my engagement has been. I wrote you that, too. He's the miserliest of misers! Diogenes, without philosophy, living in an old tub of a house, with a lantern of greed, seeking every honest man's money. I always have the creeps when with him. So grasping, you know. A man might expect his old, thin fingers to close pretty tight about his throat if there could be any money obtained. Ugh! And that niece of his is a veritable Delilah. Deuce take them! I feel

lowered in my own estimation whenever business brings me in contact with them!"

"You said you had some disagreeable business to transact with him, I remember," said Hilton, slowly,—a strange slowness for this man. "You described it very graphically in your letter. Some distance back here, isn't it? You described it pretty thoroughly."

Chesney laughed. Then a frown crossed his face.

"Yes," he said, half angrily. "A mighty disagreeable business his always is I can tell you, Hilton! He's a man I would fear if there were just cause against me with him. He would have no pity. And—he's afraid of me, of *me*, think of it!"

The young man laughed now—his own old cheery laugh that made him such a pleasant fellow, and pushed the snow aside with one boot, as though so he would push away any shadow from their conversation.

"And it was for him—so you wrote—that you must give up our party, Chesney. Why didn't you let him whistle for you until to-morrow,

any way? You would have enjoyed the hunt extremely."

"Even without the game!" said Chesney, easily. "But you see, Hilton, we business men cannot do as we would; we have to yield to the wishes of our clients a little. We have his affairs, my partner and I, and, as he demanded my presence upon important business, I had to come. That is business, you know."

Silence for a moment. Somewhere, deeper in the woods, a squirrel uttered his short, staccato bark. A scurry of light, biting wind swept down through the long aisles of birch and oak, crackling the dry leaves upon the gray boughs and whirling a slight glitter of snow from the ground around and around their feet. Save for these noises, there was almost the coldness and hush of death in the great, lonely woods. The sky was very blue overhead; the snow was spotless as it stretched away as far as the eye could reach, save where the marks of each man's footsteps cut down to the moss and dead leaves beneath.

The silence was growing awkward for both,

each instinctively recalling how much the other had to do with his life, and it must at once be broken or leave them in its power.

"Well," said George Chesney, feeling this weight upon them, beating his hands swiftly and lightly together that they should not become benumbed by the cold, the shadow that seemed reflected from his companion's face lifting from his own—"well, this is an insinuating wind, Hilton. I must be off to Nyack. I walked through the woods from Nanuet to old Hardman's house; a pretty long walk, to be sure, but for a fellow like myself, who is shut up all day in the office or in some stuffy court, it is a regular outing, you see! I'm not so hard to please as you fellows who have no one's wishes to consider. Of course, necessity is the master of the world's arts, they say; having walked *to* Hardman's, I am obliged to walk *from* there!"

"You wrote you would walk and might possibly meet us here," Roy Hilton said, this strange uneasiness upon him. "We hoped this would be the case, but I seem to be the only fortunate one."

"And how does this happen?" queried Chesney, easily. "Where are the other fellows? Ten of you there are, I think? It's a shame I couldn't join you, but so the fates decide for and against one. Taken right out of my hands, you know! Maybe the old lady—Justice, of course—is blindfolded; but it seems to me she falls upon one fellow over and over again, as though she had some special spite against him, and knew instinctively which was he, even if she couldn't see. Perhaps I believe too thoroughly in fatality, Hilton. You're a steadier fellow, and have no such light ideas."

Roy joined in his laughter. A darkness settled in his eyes as they rested upon the frank face opposite. His lips looked almost cruel, shut close as they were under the blonde mustache. Then he swung himself clear of the wall and faced about. In that one instant of turning, he conquered whatever emotion set that change upon his face. He laughed easily, also; and his eyes, in their new expression, were pleasant to see.

"There's a fatality that shapes our lives, I believe, as well as you, Chesney," he said.

"Not without our own motives behind them, but still running straight on in any given line and impossible to avoid. Perhaps this will be proved to you when I say that here am I lost from the others, and the only one to meet you, when we all hoped to have that pleasure."

A new expression swept over Chesney's face. A shadow darkened his own eyes. For an instant, he bit his lip savagely, as though to avoid making some reply other than he would allow himself to utter.

"A mutual pleasure," he then said, quietly. "I had no thought of meeting you here, Hilton. When you spoke, I at first thought it might be one of those mysterious warnings that our mediums tell us of. I'm not a medium. I'm merely explaining my sensation at the moment. It's absurd."

"And you'll say that I am absurd, also," said Roy Hilton, lightly, swinging the rifle down from his shoulder and resting the butt upon the ground, one hand upon the muzzle. "*I* think it

absurd myself since meeting you so accidentally."

Chesney lifted his head with a sudden movement of suspicion. Was there intentional emphasis upon the last word? He was not a suspicious man, but his life and the strange, unpleasant relation existing between himself and Hilton, caused him to be sensitive. Then he shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"In what are *you* absurd, Hilton?" he queried, carelessly. "One wouldn't expect you to utter such sentiments, and they need an explanation."

"Why—" there was a strange restlessness upon Roy Hilton, as he ground the impression of the rifle-butt deeper and deeper into the snow and dead leaves—"why, to tell you the truth, Chesney, I believe I'm lost! We fellows were up on a ridge where the undergrowth was pretty thick, and we disagreed regarding the traces of rabbits, and, as I was in the utter minority of *one*, I turned off to the right to put my ideas into practice and justify my claims, leaving the others to go in the opposite direction. We were to meet at the break in the

woods back on the Nyack turnpike; but when I came to search for that spot I failed to discover it; and—here we are!"

George Chesney laughed heartily. There was always a constraint upon these two men when in each other's society, but they struggled against the feeling as being unmanly, and both were manly men.

"Here we are—yes," he said; "and here I was *to* be, as I think I wrote you; but what *you* are doing here is another thing. Explain yourself. It's rather absurd for Roy Hilton, our crack shot, to be lost among the Ramapo Hills within two miles of Nanuet."

"But you must remember," Roy Hilton took him up hastily—neither could bear interference from the other—"that the Ramapo Hills might better be the Wind River Mountains for me. There I would be on familiar ground; here, I am lost."

"However—and I say it with regret, remembering what brought me here—all this country is familiar to *me*, Hilton, and if you choose to come, I'll show you the way to the Nanuet station.

ROY LIFTED HIS RIGHT HAND WITH A PASSIONATE GESTURE.—*See Page* 21.

You can take the New Jersey and New York Railway from there to the city, you know. If you don't show up, the fellows will think that you have gone on home. They'd never believe that Roy Hilton was lost when rabbit shooting."

Both men laughed pleasantly, and the sound ran lightly along the silence with a ring of good comradeship and life, in the quiet woods.

Far down in the distance the chattering squirrel broke the white silence, and another whirl of wind sent the crisp snow eddying around their feet.

"The only objection to your suggestion is," Hilton said, after a moment's thoughtfulness, "that I agreed to meet the fellows at the edge of the wood, and I would not like to go on home without them, Chesney. They might linger here searching for me. Besides, I promised, you know." He smiled—and Roy Hilton's smile was good to see. "Why should I break my word?"

Chesney shrugged his shoulders lightly.

"It wouldn't be Roy Hilton *to* break his word," he said. "I cannot blame you, my dear fellow. Only—do not again go from the path. A night

in these woods wouldn't be the most agreeable. I understand them thoroughly. I warn you!"

Roy nodded. A slumbering fire woke in his eyes, a peculiar flush crept to his cheeks; he pulled at one end of his mustache, awkwardly.

"By the way," he said, nervously and with hesitation, as though he would not needlessly wound his companion, "I think you did not ask about my wife, Chesney. She is well—she is always well, you know. I hope"—and now the hesitation made words almost harsh—"I hope that you will come down to us—soon, my dear fellow. We must not—you and I—be other than friends. Here"—he held out his right hand, that nervous left hand still upon the rifle—"here is my hand, Chesney. Take it, and let it bind our friendship."

The frank good-nature died from Chesney's face. The gray eyes flamed with angry fire. The head was lifted with a swift haughtiness that could match even Roy Hilton's old blood. A pallor struck the sternly repressed, proud face, and set the lips stiffly. Involuntarily his hands

fell, clenched, to his side. A man in the height of his pride—the shield to a sore heart.

"Hilton," he said, steadily, though there was an unnatural hoarseness in his usually clear voice, and the stern lips could scarcely articulate as he would have them. "I bear no ill-will toward you more than I would toward any man who held the place toward myself that you hold. The race was free. You won her. I lost. I have yielded to fatality. But this I must say—you shall hear me now that the opportunity has come to speak—that *I* had an equal chance with you. She was kind to me until you came. We were lovers always up to that time. I would not recall old scenes and memories. I would not wound you or my own honor enough to speak of the things that have gone. She was a woman who would be just and generous. I can be no less than the same. She is, too, a woman, and must choose for herself whom she would bless with her love. Only—and until you spoke I never thought that I would say this—only, remember; she was promised to me until you came and won her away! That I con-

cede. But there is this much that you must yield to me; that she loved me once. She would have been *my* wife to-day had you remained away! And now this subject must die forever between us! The memory belongs to me. Until I have conquered memory I demand that silence shall rest upon it. No man, especially yourself, has the right to touch upon it! And until I can say that the subject is not a sad one to me I cannot permit myself to accept such an invitation from you—and *her!*"

He was remarkably handsome as the fading glow of sunset struck through the trees, and, flushing the snow around them, touched even the human faces marked with bitterness and pride and passion.

A frown was growing blacker and blacker over Roy Hilton's face. His blood was proud and hot, and swift to take offense, strive as he would to restrain his passion for the sake of his manhood. He drew his tall figure proudly erect, and his lips took on a haughty curve, his eyes black with the intensity of his emotion.

"That, as you well say, Chesney, is for you to

decide," he said, between his lips. "I am bound to respect your pride, but I must also—and I, too, have the right to demand—that you shall not again speak of my wife—*my wife*, remember—in the terms of your old relations with her. That she chose me instead of yourself was her prerogative. The right has forever gone from you to speak of her—even to think of her—other than as another man's wife. She would scorn you if she knew—"

Chesney started forward, as though he would strike the man before him in his swift fury born of the last words. His eyes gleamed at this that was to his wounded heart an insult. He was white to the lips, but he clenched his hands and conquered his anger. Then he spoke, and his voice was such as no one had ever before heard from George Chesney.

"Hilton!" he exclaimed, under his breath, as though he must keep down even his words, lest they conquer him and throw down all barriers of manhood. "You are going too far, Hilton. Because Helen Stuart chose you—"

Roy lifted his right hand with a passionate

gesture, his face matching in pallor that of his companion. His eyes burned blackly.

"I refuse to even hear her name from your lips at such a time as this," he said, with a steadiness born of intense self-repression. "I have done my best to hold you my friend in spite of this that has come between us; but now—"

"But now!" retorted Chesney. "Now I demand that you let this subject die utterly out, Hilton. When I have lost memory, we may speak of it. Not now."

There was a rustling of the bushes near at hand, and a woman's face peered through, but neither man saw or heard. The broad cart track ran along beyond the hedge of bush and brier to the right, and those passing through the wood from the main road in Nanuet used this rough road.

"And I tell you," exclaimed Roy Hilton, starting forward, his eyes upon the other, his hand raised, clenched above him—"I tell you here and now, Chesney, that I will not bear one more word from you upon this subject! It is an insult to her as well as to myself, and any man

who dares breathe insult to her may hold his life cheaply when in my hands. Her honor is more to me than all the world. I would avenge any lightest word against her without the least hesitation. Remember that."

"So!" whispered the woman behind the thicket, a gleam in her eyes. She shrugged her shoulders suggestively, and turned away. "Jealous, eh? And that's Lawyer Chesney, too! Smart man; but I wonder that he doesn't make a charge against the other, and so gain a pretty high damage. But these folks in high life are so mighty afraid of their honor!"

She laughed contemptuously and disappeared in the thickest of the woods.

George Chesney did not reply to Roy's last words. He dared not speak lest his passion gain the mastery, and he would not yield to passion. He was a splendid fellow, in spite of his natural carelessness. He stood facing his rival quite motionless for a few minutes. The pallor faded and flushed and returned to his face. His teeth were shut down fiercely over his lips. He kept his hands at his sides resolutely.

Then, as though still he could not speak, he breathed deeply, biting his lip, and turned away down the path that soon hid him in the distance. A crisp silence remained. Even the squirrel was still. The wind had died away as the sunset glowed and flushed.

"Dastard!" murmured Roy Hilton, presently, between his stiff lips, his eyes mechanically falling upon the rifle which he still grasped so fiercely, his face betraying the struggle passing within between his mad passion of rage and jealousy and his strength of nobility—jealousy wakened at the thought that any man should dare think of his wife as this other man had dared. "He to tell me to my face that he has not yet placed that memory behind him, as any *man* should do!"

CHAPTER II.

A STRUGGLE WITH SELF.

Roy had forgotten where he was. Still standing where George Chesney left him, his eyes now turned along the darkening path, now bent moodily upon his boots, his thoughts were of the past and of the future. Of the past when, just graduated and left to the care of guardians, he took up his life with a zest and impulse natural to him. He had no special vocation in life but to be a true gentleman, and live up to the pride, the nobility of character and kindness of heart that descended to him through a long line of stern old Knickerbockers, one black vein among the high-born blood.

And this black vein was a jealousy in love that was almost insanity—among some of his ancestors had even developed into that malady.

Knowing this well—for the old Knickerbocker Hiltons were proud of their genealogy, and kept their history alive—Roy did all in human power to strengthen his character against this black enemy of peace; but it lived too long and ran too strong through the generations to yield to one man's will.

Standing in the silence of the woods, Roy Hilton realized this, and involuntarily groaned, with a swift gesture of despair at the futility of his effort. He had traveled, not aimlessly, but that he should gain better knowledge than books could give, and with a widening appreciation of humanity, not as a people, but as individuals.

He was eight-and-twenty, and a high-souled, cultured gentleman when he returned home and met Helen Stuart. She was a cultured woman, graceful and gracious, with a soul, perhaps, not so broad as his own, because lacking contact with the world, but a noble woman's soul, nevertheless.

He loved her. He met many women as beautiful, cultured and gracious, but Helen

Stuart was the first woman whom he loved—and with him to love once was to love always.

Helen Stuart had many suitors. George Chesney was most favored among them. He and Helen were children together; he was her boy-lover even then. The Stuarts had a country-seat at Nyack. The Chesneys made this beautiful riverside town their home, spending little time in the city, even during the season. George only was in New York a great deal as Helen's recognized escort. Naturally, they drifted into an understanding, if not an actual engagement. She admired him, and having no awakening as to the height of a life brightened by love, she mistook sentiment for passion. He loved her and his love was as intense as Roy Hilton's. But Roy Hilton came—and won.

Theirs was not love at first sight. With either of them that was impossible. There was an intensity and a depth in Helen's character and Roy's that could not be awakened at a touch. They became friends; afterward, lovers.

But when Roy Hilton let love into his heart, he also opened the road to that demon of jeal-

ousy that spoiled many a life among the generations gone before him. He knew it had always been so, but trusted that with him, struggling against it as he had, it might be different; but the stain on a glass cannot be washed out by one pure drop. He was as insane as any among those stern forefathers, for the time, with the thought that another man held love in his heart for his wife—*his* wife. Helen Hilton was to be thought of by no one but as his own. That this man struggled to conquer his love could not drown the truth. He loved her, and loved her still. This demon, lying latent in his blood, grew stronger and blacker the more he thought of it. It rested so equally between them, which should win, that George Chesney might have been in his place to-day but for "fatality." That other man, with his handsome face and *debonnaire* manners once claimed Helen's love, had given her his own—nay, gave it to her still! That other man—

He bit his lip savagely, and a flush swept the pallor from his face. His finger-nails cut reck-

lessly into the palm of his hand as it fell clenched at his side.

He raised the rifle suddenly and swung it to his shoulder; wheeling upon his heel—his face set like marble—not in the direction pointed out for him to take, but in George Chesney's very footsteps. His eyes were stormy and yet wonderfully sad with this bitter, biting struggle between a noble soul and a demon born in the blood centuries past.

The snow crushed under foot, stirring the dead leaves beneath, leaving his course well marked in the footsteps of the other.

CHAPTER III.

THROUGH THE WHITE SILENCE.

As for Chesney, his thoughts would have matched Roy Hilton's in their tumult and fever; but he fought against love that was so long in his life that it could not be torn out at a moment's bidding without also ending life. He

fought against love, knowing that his manhood and honor demanded this; but though a mighty enemy to his peace, it was in no other phase comparable with the demon centuries old that rose full-statured that day in his successful rival's heart.

The struggle was bitter; the pride in his blood cried out against the truth that was forced upon him as an insult from the man who should have been his friend because of his nobility and victory; but, in spite of his anger and humiliation and pride, he knew—and knowing softened his heart—that his friend was both generous and just. There was that height of manhood in each that forced recognition from the other. Meeting under other circumstances, their friendship would have been lasting and deep.

The first flush of his anger was dying out. He recalled, for he was just, the qualities that made his friend so dangerous to his happiness. He slackened his pace as his excitement cooled. Once he paused and glanced around upon the solitude. A dry twig somewhere near crackled and broke, making a sharp sound in the silence.

He turned quickly, his face lighting, almost hoping it were his friend coming in his generosity to take back his words, so granting him the opportunity to make amends for his own haughtiness. But nothing followed, nothing lay behind him but his well-defined tracks in the light snow.

Nothing?

"It's a long walk after all from Hardman's old house in these woods to Nanuet," he said, by and by, as he walked on more slowly, the semi-darkness of a snowy night thickening around him. He was no coward. He liked such solitude as that when in his disturbed mood, but he was restless. Then he laughed, and his face cleared of its sadness as he said, lightly:

"Thinking of my life's ghosts makes me superstitious. I shall be glad to resume the society of my fellowmen. Old Hardman's impression upon me, too. If ever there was an old sinner, he is one! He knows I am beginning to see through his sharpness, and he has no love for me."

Was there any one in the bushes back there that the dry twigs crackled so? The cart-track

was just to the right, and that was the usual cross-cut from Nanuet to the Nyack turnpike. Perhaps some one was passing that way and would bear him company. He would be rather glad of companionship. It might be the hunting-party not far off, though he caught no sound of voices. Friend or stranger, he would take up with him rather than walk the rest of the way alone. He stopped and turned his pleasant face toward the dry thicket that hid the view of the cart-track beyond.

"Hello!" he said, cheerily. "Anybody there? If so, comrade, let's go on together. It's a trifle ghostly in this place alone."

A pleasant laugh that of his. A pleasant face turned toward the thicket in the gathering gloom. A light step, full of life and strength of purpose and pride of manhood, sounded upon the lightly lying snow, as he started across to the thicket. Life and light and youth and determination to be noble embodied in him.

* * * * * * *

A half-hour later, Roy Hilton, in his hunting-

suit of blue, a good deal the worse for briers and thickets, his rifle in its case, his face very white and determinedly set, boarded the train for New York at the Nanuet station, some dozen or so idly curious eyes gazing after the handsome stranger with the haughty air. At that very moment, out in the white silence of the woods, what was it lying motionless and lifeless upon the snow, under the whispering trees behind the thicket? Did the footprints lead to that?

CHAPTER IV.

THE GATHERING CLOUD.

"By the Lord Harry, you fellows, I believe we're in luck at last!" exclaimed a good-natured voice, as a young man struck into the cart track from the deeper woods to the right, a gun resting carelessly over his shoulder, the game-bag at his side pretty fairly filled, as one or two gray cottony tails in view mutely proclaimed:

"Here's an open track, as good to see after the briers and brambles as the Appian Way."

"It's your luck, Whitney; you're always in luck," said another young man, dashing out into the open path with a plunge through the thicket. "If it isn't anything more than a hunting-suit, you are always in it."

"Hear! Hear!" cried half a dozen laughing voices; and with considerable confusion and gay words and laughter, some half-a-score of young men crowded out into the path. All good-looking, good-natured, wealthy fellows, in high spirits after the day's fair sport, the fading light through the woods glinting now and then along their rifle-barrels or touching some one face among them into relief against the dark background of trees and thicket and falling of night.

"It's a mighty odd thing, though," said the first speaker, after a moment, as they crowded on together in a group of nine, his handsome face turned back toward his companion, grave with anxiety. "It's a mighty odd thing where Hilton is! We've hallooed until we have no

voices left, and he hasn't so much as breathed a note in answer, to our knowledge."

"In all probability he has had our good fortune to find this track and gone on to the railway station," suggested one of the party, more assurance in his voice than in his face, although the deepening gloom hid this from the eyes of his companions.

"That is like you, Chadwick," said the young man nearest him, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Always choosing the easiest way out of trouble! I never did see such a fellow!"

"Better luck next time, then!" said Chadwick, laughing. He glanced suspiciously, though stealthily, from left to right, where the snowfall made ghostly phantoms of tree and bush and brier. A good-natured, easy-going fellow generally, but now indefinably impressed by the darkness of the woods.

"By the shade of brave Robin Hood, but we sound like a band of robbers," said another of the party, lightly. "We haven't bagged anything but rabbit and quail; but it's been a good day, after all."

"Unless we've bagged a mysterious disappearance!" added his companion on the right. "It *is* rather strange that Hilton couldn't find the trysting-place, Graham. Hilton's no fool, and he would never get *lost* in these woods."

"He has been here only once before, you know, Manning," said a young man, calling from the rear of the party. "It is possible, if not probable, that Hilton has strayed somewhere hereabout."

"Lost, strayed or stolen!" Graham retorted. "Let's set it up on a board. The natives will think it a sheep!"

"Or a dog," suggested Chadwick, at random, this strange depression upon him.

"Or a cow. That is the way they advertise lost property, isn't it?"

"Nevertheless," said Whitney, quietly, and the joking fell off at the gravity in his voice as he met Jack Graham's amused glance, "it isn't like Hilton to break an agreement. If he has gone on, it is only under peculiar circumstances. He may have gone to the place, you know, and waited a reasonable time before going on. It isn't Hilton's way to fall back on his word."

"That's so," acquiesced Manning, as gravely as Whitney had spoken. "You're right there, Frank. Hilton wouldn't do it for a lark; he never trifled with his honor even at college, and he wouldn't begin now."

"No," said Frank Whitney, steadily, swinging his rifle from one shoulder to the other, the darkness now so low upon them that no face was clearly to be seen. "No. It isn't Hilton's way, Manning."

Silence through the dim woods. The crunching of their feet over the snow, the occasional sharp click of a twig against their rifles, or a swish as a bough fell back as they passed on, broke the wide hush. Somewhere, far in the distance, a hound bayed. The shriek of an engine pierced the solitude as a train thundered along at the far edge of the wood.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, with crush and crunch of the softly lying snow upon the leaves and rough ruts of the track. Conversation died, and uncomfortable anxiety replaced it. They knew quite too well that something out of the ordinary kept Roy Hilton from meeting them at the break

of the woods at the edge of the Nyack turnpike. Tramp, tramp, tramp, and a rustle and crackle of underwood and brier. How very still and mysterious the woods were, stretching away upon both sides, and only opening definitely ahead where lay the little town.

"It has been a good day, but I wish Hilton were with us instead of mysteriously disappearing," said Chadwick, discontentedly, as they struck into the road at the edge of the woods, the railway station in sight, though still some distance away.

"And it has given us the blues to a man, tramping through that murderous wood in the darkness," said Graham, restlessly, though with apparent unconcern.

"What is the row, I wonder?" added Nelson, to one of the others, as they neared the station, where an excited group was collected. "The price of corn gone up, I should think, judging from their eagerness, or the failure of somebody's potato crop."

"Don't be ridiculous, Nelson," advised Manning, slapping the game-bag slung over his

shoulder in a self-satisfied way, as they stepped up on the lower end of the platform.

"There isn't so much as a shred of hope on potatoes this year, you know. That's hopelessly gone by."

"Anyhow, it's something that makes them a little extra to-night," said Chadwick, confidently. "They're pretty easy-going in ordinary."

"A mighty sight *too* much something," retorted a bystander, overhearing this remark. "It'd be as well for some folks if it wa'n't always necessary for something to *be* the matter on such occasions, stranger."

"What is it, friend?" queried Graham, good-humoredly. "Nothing serious, I hope?"

"That's accordin' how it's took," was the sullen answer, as the man eyed the group suspiciously. "If 'twas *me* in his place, I'd feel powerful 'fraid folks 'd take it hard."

He considered this a joke, and laughed roughly, turning away, when another man interposed:

"Mebby they're his friends, Jim," he said,

persuasively. "There ain't no use in bein' hard on 'em if they didn't do it."

"Do what?" queried Nelson, amusedly, thinking the man merely boorish and sullen.

Jim shrugged his shoulders significantly.

"A deed I wouldn't care to be accused of," he said, sententiously. "Murder ain't a special pleasant thing no ways you ken fix it, an' there ain't no doubt that this is murder."

Excitement took the place of careless good-humor in that group of young men. Murder at any time rouses curiosity and indignation and horror. Under their fear for their absent friend the news came upon them startlingly.

"Why the devil don't you explain?" demanded Graham, in sudden fierceness. "If it isn't a joke, be sensible, man!"

The man grumbled, but complied:

"The body was found in the snow just beyond the thicket, at the side of the cart track," the man explained, concisely. "One of old Hardman's farm-hands found it, on his way from the town to the old house in the woods, just at dusk. Been dead no longer than an

hour, the medical man said. Murder, undoubtedly. There was a rifle-ball straight though his heart. A near aim, too. Some one firing from the thicket—no further, for the clothing was burned around the wound."

They were intensely excited, those young men just in from their day's pleasuring. Their faces were blanched with dread of what might be made known in the next words. Their absent friend was uppermost in their minds.

The man who was giving this news as they hastened along the platform and across to the store where the body had been carried, knowing nothing of their anxiety, continued his description.

"It's bad enough for him," he said, significantly, with a nod in the direction they were going, "but it's worse for the other feller. We see him go off on the train not more'n a half-hour after that. Mebby you know him," glancing sharply at the group around him. "Tall, he was, an' a good bit handsome, dressed like you fellers. Blue eyes, fair hair an' mustache. He was white an' powerful uppish in manner, an'

proud as though he was a-treadin' of us down. Seemed in a mighty hurry to be off. Had a rifle along of him an' a game-bag. Pretty black for him, there ain't no doubt. They'd had a quarrel, some says. Old Hardman's niece heard 'em as she was comin' through the woods. The dead man's her uncle's lawyer, you know. Chesney is—"

"*Who* is?" thundered Frank Whitney, stopping short and turning upon the speaker in such a fury of horror and dismay that the man fell back involuntarily, raising his hand as though he feared a blow. "What! What do you mean, man? Speak up! Chesney dead, you say—murdered? And who is suspected—"

His voice died out in very horror. His face was pallid and drawn. The same fear seemed to have fallen upon his comrades.

"Horrible!" he muttered, turning away toward the station, as though he dared not face what lay lifeless and still in the store just over the way, his companions following him, save Manning and Graham. "What shall we do, friends? Chesney is murdered—"

They knew his fear. All of Roy Hilton's friends knew the circumstances of his love affair. They knew, too, his passionate temperament, and dared not utter words, lest they speak unadvisedly, and silence be best.

CHAPTER V.

HELEN.

Helen Hilton sank down laughing in a chair opposite her mother in the latter's dressing-room, lightly clasping her slim, white fingers around one of the cushions against which she leaned so gracefully and luxuriantly, her large brown eyes half-closed in lazy enjoyment.

"I declare, mamma, I am tired almost to death," she said, in her soft, musical voice, her parted red lips showing the glimmer of pearly teeth within. "Carlie and I were shopping all the morning. We met some of the girls, too, and formed a party to drive in the Park this afternoon; and while we were driving in the

Park—I love every step of that old Park, I believe, Mamma Stuart—we decided to go to the theatre to-night, if our escorts are not too utterly fatigued after the hunt. A grand time they have had, no doubt—men do so enjoy hunting out poor little harmless rabbits and quail and things—but it always seems an eternity when Roy is away for an entire day. He spoils me, you know."

She laughed softly, and unclasped her fingers, to turn them recklessly through the dainty curls on her forehead. A beautiful woman in truth; not spoiled, but rendered somewhat careless of the world beyond her world, by her own success and happy life and ease. Her husband adored her. Nothing that money could buy did she desire and not obtain. She was the only child of the proud old Stuart house, and although her parents were given over to society and its least demands, yet they loved and were intensely proud of this one exquisitely beautiful daughter. Her social success and alliance with a house as old and blue-blooded and proud as theirs increased their perfect satisfaction in her.

Mrs. Stuart smiled with proud pleasure upon the animated face among the stuffy cushions of the huge arm-chair. She was a beautiful woman herself, her white hair under an atom of lace, her brown eyes still bright with spirit and fire, her haughty face strangely softened toward the small woman opposite.

"I think Roy spoils you because you are so much of a child, Helen," she said, laughingly. She was toying with a polished ebony hand-mirror. Her maid was but just gone, dismissed after arranging her mistress's hair, that the two should not be interrupted. The atmosphere of the room was heavy with the fragrance of toilet waters and perfumes. After a moment, the slender little figure rose from the huge chair and crossed to the long, lace-draperied window.

"Let me open the window one moment, mamma," she said, her hands upon the sash, her smiling dark eyes resting upon the older eyes of the same hue. "I am suffocating. Your rooms are always so sweet with odors, that it is like being smothered in flowers. Too much of any good thing, you know— The thought of flowers

is delightful, but if one is to be smothered with them, it is death just the same. May I open it, mother *mia?*"

"Since you have taken to summering in the Adirondacks, you are a fanatic about air," said Mrs. Stuart, calmly. She allowed nothing to disturb her equanimity. Worry or impatience spoiled one's expression and smoothness of face. Perhaps her calmness accounted for the perfect baby softness of her face. "Open the window if you wish, Helen; but remember that it is late November weather, and slightly chilly."

Helen laughed, and shrugged her pretty shoulders. A comical pucker wrinkled her brows. Her dark eyes looking out from this elaborate wrinkle were merry and bright. She knelt at the opened window inhaling the crisp air.

"It is so good," she said, solemnly. "Maybe it is cold, but one must have air in winter as well as in summer, *chere* mamma. See! So I clear away the dead, close atmosphere of the shops, that let new blood into my heart against Roy's

return. I like always to be at my best with him."

"You are a spoiled child," said her mother, with unusual fondness. "Now close the window, Helen. It is time to dress for dinner. You will dine with us and let Roy come on here—"

"Oh, no, no!" Helen interrupted, hastily. She closed the window, after a last deep breath of the clear outer air, and crossed to one of the mirrors to arrange her bonnet—a scrap of a thing in reds and browns that rested upon her beautiful hair as though it loved it. She pushed up to the last correct point the long, loose wrists of her tan-colored Suede gloves and nestled her soft dimpled chin in the long hair of her boa, shrugging her shoulders, glancing critically sideways into the mirror to see that her coat sat well. A beautiful, proud, bewitching woman, conscious of her perfections and imperfections, with the capabilities of making a noble woman should her life rouse the latent power within the soul looking out of those great, dark, shy, proud eyes.

"Now, Mamma Stuart!" She turned from the mirror quite satisfied. "I must hurry on home. I walked here, you know. I was *so* tired of the carriage, and the air is just right for walking. I wish Roy had invited *me* to join the hunt. I would have gone fast enough, and Carlie, and dear little Kit and some of the others, only men never think how we would like a share in such of their pleasures. The lords of creation sometimes overlook the ladies in their magnificence!"

She laughed merrily and touched her mother's beautiful hair with her light fingers, stooping to kiss her.

"*Au revoir*, mother mine! You will be at the Carletons', I presume? We will go there after one or two scenes—after seeing the Kendals at their best, you know. I so admire that woman!"

She flitted away as though in truth she belonged to the crisp, bright outer air, and not the heavy atmosphere of the luxurious room, her skirts rustling softly down the polished oaken staircase, her face like a picture in the mellow light of the hall. Passing on to the library ere leaving the

"COME IN," HE SAID, "LITTLE ONE. WHERE IS ROY?"—*See Page* 49.

house, she tapped lightly upon the closed door, holding back the rich, heavy drapery before it. Then, pushing it open, she stood, a bright vision upon the threshold.

DeWitt Stuart was sitting before the glowing grate-fire, his slippered feet upon the fender, reading the evening paper, one or two that he had read fallen to the floor. He raised his eyes from the news columns as his daughter paused in the doorway. His cold blue eyes took on a warmer glint. He smiled speaking to her.

"Come in," he said, "little one. Where is Roy?"

"Gone with the hunting-party, you know, papa."

"Oh, yes," nodding gravely. "I remember, now. Come to the fire. It is chilly to-day, Helen."

She shook her bright head merrily but resolutely. The dimples were coming and going in her cheeks. The fire reflected itself in sparkles in her eyes. The mellow glow from the reading-lamp fell upon her father's white head and touched her face tenderly.

"But, indeed, I am not cold, papa," she said gayly, smoothing the long ends of the boa with her restless fingers, still standing in the doorway. "I am never cold, you know! If Stanley ever undertakes the North Pole instead of African wilderness, I shall join the expedition! Only," her laughter and bright words were good to hear in the great darkened room, "only I should be tempted to remain with you, if I yielded to your invitation, Papa Stuart, the fire is so pretty! I just stopped to say good-bye. Good-bye, Papa Stuart, untill we meet at Mrs. Carleton's! It is almost time for Roy, and I must hurry. I wouldn't have him come without being home to meet him!"

DeWitt Stuart nodded, smiling upon his daughter.

"You will spoil Roy as he has spoiled you," he said, in the kind and gentle voice only this one person ever heard.

She laughed and ran away along the hall and out at the big doors, closing them softly behind her, and hurrying along the streets as crisp and bright and beautiful as the descending night,

her warm heart pulsing with pride for the man she was hastening to welcome as she welcomed always his return, never dreaming of the threatening cloud lowering above her.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ARREST.

After the news was made known through the village that George Chesney had been found murdered in the woods between Nanuet and the Nyack road, and that a handsome stranger, apparently much excited, had been seen to come from those woods in a hunting-suit, with a rifle in its case, and take the train for the city, there was too much excitement to clearly remember what had taken place. There was no doubt that the news spread wildly; that the coroner was called; that he impaneled a jury, and that the verdict was the unmistakable fact that the man was dead, and that he met his death "under suspicious circumstances."

This last was the arrow that struck at Roy Hilton's honor. He was a stranger there; he was seen to leave the place under strong excitement; he had been seen by old Hardman's niece quarrelling with the dead man in the woods, not a half hour previous to his death; the wound was made by a rifle ball; there was but that one round, and it was fired from the thicket bordering the cart track from which the stranger was seen to emerge from the woods. This statement led to a telegram, sent to the city, ordering the stranger's detention at Jersey City, for which place his ticket was purchased. An officer was sent down to bring him back to Nyack to await further developments, or bring back such proof of his innocence as must overbalance the strong circumstantial evidence against him. When the officer made known his errand and took him into custody, Roy's first impulse was to strike down the man where he stood, for daring to charge him—him, Roy Hilton, with such a crime. But he placed a stern restraint upon his anger, and memory of the afternoon's meeting and what followed returning all too vividly upon

him, the hand impulsively raised in self-defense fell clenched at his side, and the strange pallor upon his face during the journey only deepened, as he put his teeth down sharply over the groan that rose to his lips. He staggered for an instant, stricken by the weight of *the truth* against him. Then he drew himself up proudly, all the strong old blood of his line coming to his aid, and signified his willingness to return with the officers to the little town among the hills.

Justice followed so sharply upon the deed that he was stunned, thinking of it as they were whirled over the Northern road a half-hour later. He would not try to free himself from the charge until such time as should call for accusation and justification. He would not even ask if his friends had been heard from, or to send a message to his wife. The crime charged upon him was so black and so clear that he would bear it alone as long as he could. It was bitter, degrading. He would keep it from his wife and friends until necessity made it known.

"They will know of it soon enough," he

groaned to himself, his elbow upon the window-sill of the car, his chin in his hands, his eyes, half proud, half pathetic, wholly steady in their gaze, staring out upon the whirling scenery. One of the officers in civilian dress sat with him; the other occupied the seat behind. He was not handcuffed. In that they were generous. There was something about the man that commanded respect in spite of the charge against him. The men had seen too much of life to be easily soft-hearted, but they were not unjust. Men in as high life as he had been charged with murder before, but they would not be harsh. Circumstances were black against him, but, as yet, he was not *proved* a murderer.

How swiftly the time flew between Roy's arrest and their arrival at the Nyack depot, yet an eternity of sorrow and pain passed over his soul. He bore himself just as erect and manly, his eyes never flinching from the gaze of those they met. He looked as handsome and proud and noble walking between the officers, as ever he looked in his life. But appearances deceive

oftentimes, the people said, gossiping later, and bravado sometimes goes for a noble pride.

The hunting-party were awaiting him at the station-house. He feared this would be the case, but did not flinch from the meeting. For an instant the color flamed into his face and then gave place to a more deadly pallor.

"I did not think to meet you—so," he said, quietly, his voice perfectly even, though he refused the outstretched hands of his friends. "Who guessed this morning what would come with the night? And—" his eyes, darkened with a nameless shadow, turned to Frank Whitney's kind face. "And George Chesney is dead—murdered—these men tell me—murdered—by *me!* Do you believe me guilty, Frank—you, my old chum?"

Whitney silenced him. A flush came into his face. He laid his hand on Roy's arm, the others pressing about him. The officers were withdrawn, though near at hand. There was powerful influence to bear in Roy Hilton's favor and already it was felt.

"Believe you guilty? Of course not, Roy

my dear fellow!" said Frank Whitney, decisively. "We will prove your innocence, never fear. But for the present—just for the present, Roy, it is best to say little. We have done what we can—now. By and by we will do more. All in good time, dear old fellow—all in good time!"

"We will stand by you like a company of vigilants, we fellows, Roy!" declared Jack Graham, in his pleasant voice, not to be put off in his determination to grasp the prisoner's hand. "Look here, now, none of this, Hilton! I'll swear by you till my last gasp, so you may as well give us your hand on it!"

"Your heart is good and strong, Roy, old boy," added Joe Manning, as heartily as he could command himself to speak. "Don't let it fail you. We'll get you through without a scratch!"

"Our sentiments, down to the last man, Roy," added Clarence White, in hearty corroboration. "These fellows here will do their best for you, and we'll pull you through as soon as we can. Don't you lose an atom of heart!"

And so it was that proud Roy Hilton, in the height of his manhood and pride and birth, was branded with suspicion of murder and held to await his trial, the evidence so strong against him, even his warmest friends growing sick at heart fighting for proofs of his innocence.

CHAPTER VII.

BEFORE THE TRIAL.

Three weeks went by between that November day and the day set for trial. Money hurried this on, and money engaged the most skillful detectives to work up the case for proofs in his favor; and the law did everything that could be done to trace the murder to its true source; and still there could be but one verdict.

Never, Roy told himself, had events so crowded into such a short space of time, or such clear proofs risen as to the murderer.

"How does my wife bear this?" he asked Frank Whitney, his counsel, when he came to

him one day—the day preceding the trial. "They have done well to keep her from here. Her coming could do no good, and would only be an unnecessary sadness to both of us. You are her friend, Frank. Tell me truly, how do her people take this disgrace?"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders with affected lightness, and laughed genially, but his client was not to be so easily deceived. There was a shadow in the kind brown eyes that told Roy Hilton as clearly as words that all was not well, assure him as his friend would that such was the case. He forgot his own danger in this dread for his wife.

"You are not to talk of this affair as disgrace, Hilton," Whitney said. "We will bring you through all right. We are working like beavers, and believe in you so firmly that no one could doubt you; and when once you are out of this who could hold suspicion toward you?"

"That is not answering my question, Whitney," retorted Roy, sternly. There was a haggard look upon his face that struck a chill to his friend's heart; a restless light in his eyes, born of

the confinement and the suspicion. "You need not tell me that Helen is true. She could never be other than herself, under any circumstances. Even had I done this thing—" his lawyer started at the swift change on the pale face —"even had I done it, and he her friend and mine, she would be true to me. She could not doubt me. It is of her people I ask. They would sooner see me dead—far sooner, as you know—than bring disgrace upon their proud name. That has been the one bitterest drop of all this bitter; and it is bitter, Frank Whitney, beyond your knowing."

The lawyer's face changed strangely, as he stood behind Roy's chair.

"This confinement is making you gloomy—you, the jolliest fellow going, Roy," he said; and he laughed, with strange restraint upon voice and expression. "We must get you out of here to-morrow. Rest assured that there is not another night for you in this room. Your friends have the utmost faith in you, believe me."

The young man rose, locking his hands behind

him, as though with this touch of evil upon him, he could not meet the frank hand of his friend. The haggard expression deepened upon his face, in the faint light of the small room, where the lamp flared fitfully behind its smoky chimney. His eyes were larger than usual with the trouble that dawned in his heart: as though, his friend thought, watching him, he saw some terrible thing before him that must cloud his life.

"Frank," he said, hoarsely, drawing himself to his full height, and he was perfect in physique, this young man charged with the murder of his rival—"Frank, I ask you a plain question. I am not a child. Being a man, I trust I can bear what comes to me as a man should. You need hold nothing back. What will be the end of this? But tell me—my wife! my wife! What is death compared to her happiness? If it should be proved that I murdered Chesney, that in a moment of passion I took his life"—how restless and bloodshot those eyes were, and how strangely set and strained was the face!—"would it always stain her name as well as my own? Can nothing erase the blood from the

hand that may have done the deed in a moment when comprehension of what was done was beyond control? Such things do occur. Must she—if it goes as I know you fear it must—will *she* have to bear the shame, too, Frank?"

His voice died out utterly. His lawyer crossed the couple of feet of space between them and reached out his hand to lay it upon the other's shoulder; but Roy would not admit that. With a haughty uplifting of the proud, fair head and a squaring of the broad shoulders, he stepped back beyond his friend's reach, his eyes flashing with a new fire, his lips set sternly under the blonde mustache, to ward off the other's approach.

"Frank Whitney," he said, with a strange coldness, as though only so he could hope to retain his self-control, "there is no need of words between us. Your face tells me the truth as well as words could do. I have little fear of death"—how he lifted that haughty head, and how those eyes flashed, and what an altogether magnificent air there was about him!—"I think I can bear it as well as most men! But, come

out of it as I may—well or ill—and there is little hope of the former—my wife—"

The other interrupted him quietly. There was an answering fire in his eyes that proved that he was not the man to be easily silenced when once he had made up his mind to speak. He advanced upon his friend and would not be put off. Very quietly, but with infinite kindness, he laid his two hands upon the other's broad shoulders and met the flashing blue eyes with his steady brown ones. They read each other's thoughts. Then Roy spoke more steadily.

"Frank," he said, and his eyes did not falter, looking into those of his friend, "if trouble comes to us two through this strange accident of fate, I give it into your hands to make clear the road to her happiness! I don't know why I have this feeling—I would call it absurd in any one else—but I am firmly convinced that we have been too happy, Helen and I, for it to last. I'm not usually sentimental. I think I have as level a head as most men. But I hold such love in my heart for my wife as is almost idolatry.

It is too deep to last without trial. I could"—he still stood up straight and tall and handsome, in spite of the haggardness of his face—"I could in truth stain my hands with murder to keep any touch of evil from her! Do not start. I tell you the truth. Laugh at me if you will. You never proved what a woman's love is to a man. To me it is more than life—Helen's happiness!"

Again the strange pallor upon his face that so discomforted Whitney. He started at once as though he would prevent his uttering the reckless words, but restrained himself. As a lawyer, he told himself often, he had proof enough that marriages were not always made in heaven! And where was supreme love there must also be supreme jealousy! He knew it true of his friend, and his self-control left him for a moment ere he spoke, his voice quite steady and strong with faith.

"My dear fellow, I believe that you and your wife are two of the happiest people in the world. To-morrow you shall, if there is power enough in the law, be given your freedom and return to

your home and your wife. You have grown gloomy, as I said, shut up here!"

He was turning away when Roy stopped him. There was a flush on his cheeks, and a faltering in his voice.

"Frank!" he said holding out his hands toward his friend and counsel, "there is only this that I have to request: keep Helen away from here if it is in your power. I—I think I could not bear that she should see me in—this position—"

His friend laughed with forced lightness. His hand was warm and true, grasping the hand now outstretched to him. How changed was this, his friend, during these three weeks!

"You are to have no such thoughts as these, Roy," he said, heartily, determined to believe even against the crowding circumstances. "If this is your wish, I will try to fulfill it. Keep up a good heart. Twenty-four hours will see you out of here, and we will have back our jolly Hilton, not this glum man with a distrust of even his friends."

Roy laughed, but rather harshly. There was

more reason for his fear than the other knew, he said to himself, when he was again alone, resuming his attitude of despondency. He knew perhaps, better than Whitney, that he had cause to fear the outcome of the morrow's trial. And if they should prove him guilty, if there were enough evidence—how could he know of that, shut up like a dog in a kennel—if there were enough evidence to make clear that it was his hand that caused the death of his rival?

He shuddered, and a low groan escaped him. What must be the outcome of that! More than death! He did not half so much fear death—though it came upon the gallows with the black cap and the swift rope. Where were his thoughts tending? He did not fear that so much as he feared the consequent separation from his wife. He knew his wife's relations. They were undoubtedly no more wealthy than he; their blood was no bluer; their pride no more haughty. But to lay upon them a stain or hint of stain, no matter under what force of circumstances, would be past their forgiveness.

"Whitney would cheer a fellow if he were to

be hung the next minute," he said, by and by, turning his haggard face and restless, feverish eyes toward the small window, where the darkness of night made the pale reflection of the lamp like a will-o'-the-wisp upon the panes. "But do as I will, I cannot rid myself of the belief that this cannot end so easily as he would have me think. And anything—anything—death even—rather than live and know that she is kept from me because of that cloud upon my honor."

Through the long night—the longest night of his life, it seemed to Roy—he sat in his chair, now dropping off into fitful sleep, now rousing to renewed thoughts of evil upon him.

Terrible fancies filled his brain, and the darkness was fitful with ghostly shadows, gigantic in size, real in the excited imagination, frightful to the troubled heart. How he would welcome another day's light! Death, even, seemed less hard to bear with the broad light of day upon the world, and not this ghastly, unfathomable blackness.

A long, long time he sat watching through the window for the light that would herald day.

And as light comes alike to just and unjust, and the sun never falters in his rising or setting for the innocence or the guilt of man, so at last the black, blank night grew grayly into dawn in the wan east, and the full glimmer and deepening of day struck pallor to the lamp-light and the face of the watcher in the small room. A gray day, with threatening storm to come, but—day!

Ere another night fell upon him, Roy said, grimly, as he rose stiffly from his chair and crossed over to the window, as though so he hoped to breath freer—ere another night came upon him, he would be outside of that room, either free or found guilty of the murder of a man he called his friend.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRIAL.

The court-room was crowded from floor to roof with eager faces. From the rail before the dock to the utmost corner of the galleries, rows upon rows of inquisitive eyes were turned upon the judge, the jury, the lawyers and the prisoner.

Very handsome the prisoner looked in spite of the pallor upon his face, and some of those most certain of the verdict let their hearts soften toward him as they looked upon his sternly set face. His blue eyes flashed with the proud spirit that must have stood by him through even worse than this, and his broad shoulders were squared with the bearing of dignity—a very man in every feature and gesture—though they should agree, the jurymen, that he had stained

his strong white hands with another man's blood, in a fit of brutal passion.

His eyes did not falter nor fall, meeting this sea of eyes and faces, though now and then he searched the room over, a streak of red across his eyes, as though they, too, were touched by the mark of blood—resting always upon one veiled figure at the far end of the gallery. His head was proudly lifted, and he seemed almost unconscious of the terrible crime charged against him, more and more as the day wore on and the trial with it, a vacant expression creeping upon the haggard face ever and anon as he sat and listened, listened with grave attention to what was argued and what was said for and against him.

Very thoroughly and well was the trial conducted, for the law would be just and accuse no man hastily or without good evidence. Nevertheless, as the case for the prosecution was presented, and the evidence, so strong, so terrible, was laid before them, who could fail to know what a vast, vast space of proof lay piled against him in proportion to that stated for his defense.

Few in that crowded room knew what had been done in the prisoner's behalf, and the mass of attentive faces changed expression from certainty of guilt to a shade of doubt, as the powerful evidence was given for defense. The one proof that seemed so strong against him, of the rifle-ball aimed from the thicket and answering minutely to the one *gone from Roy's rifle* at the time of his arrest, was somewhat weakened when it was proved that Roy was not the only one passing through the wood almost directly upon the time of the murder. Old Hardman's niece had witnessed a quarrel between the prisoner and the murdered man, during which the former threatened the latter's life. But—old Hardman and his niece had, perhaps, as little love for George Chesney as had the prisoner. Chesney was known to have threatened the old miser with the exposure of some dark transaction, only the week preceding the murder, when the old man shook his fist in his face and dared him to do so at his peril! He was coming from Hardman's house that day. Hardman sent for him on important business. No one knew what

passed between them save the lawyer, the old man and his niece! But Jane Hardman proved that she was in that portion of the woods almost at the time of the murder. *And*—Hardman possessed a rifle with barrels corresponding to that used and carried by the prisoner upon the day of the murder; and although every charge was removed, it was known to have been loaded up to that day. To be sure, the prisoner showed considerable agitation when boarding the train at Nanuet, and all things were apparently as usual in the Hardman household, when the two hired men, Bill Harton and his brother, returned from the village where Hardman sent them upon an errand that afternoon; and so far as man could see, it rested equally between these two, whose rifle held the deadly ball.

Even the promiscuous crowd crammed into the court-room, waiting for the final decision that must prove the prisoner guilty, and eager to know what sentence should be passed upon him, unconsciously felt Whitney's influence when he rose to make his final address to the jury.

As he rose, all idle chatter under breath, all restless movement fell into silence; a dead hush was upon the room; all eyes centered upon the man in the dock and his eloquent counsel. Never before had that court-room held such a speaker; not that his words were many; hundreds of men had uttered hundreds of more words than he, in a like cause, and failed; but what he said was clear and concise, yet aimed at their hearts as well as their judgments, and when finished and seated himself, there were tears in many eyes unused to weep.

He told of the young man's unblemished life; of his efforts to conquer the evil touch of jealousy so strongly held against him; of his endeavor to make men better by his kindly words and deeds; of the undoubted friendly intercourse between him and George Chesney. "A high-souled, highly-honored Christian gentleman—" would he in a fit of reckless passion take the life of another such?

Still, when the prosecuting counsel rose and summed up the case for prosecution, there were the facts indisputable upon his side; and the

fickle crowd no longer listening to the eloquent man whose words were so quiet and so impressive, knew not what to believe and scarcely knew what they desired should be the ending of the trial. This man, too, was eloquent, and his words forcible with facts even clearer than those offered by his opponent. He spoke of the dead man's home of mourning and the noble life cut short by a dastardly act.

The prisoner was known to have cause against the murdered man; it was an indisputable fact that this one element of insane jealousy belonged to the blood of the family; he was heard to threaten his rival, and an hour thereafter his rival was found murdered. He knew this man was to be in that portion of the woods; George Chesney sent written word to the club to that effect, when stating his inability to join them. The prisoner disagreed with his friends and struck off *alone* at about the hour his rival was to be in the woods. Evidence was given that they met and quarreled; and the foot-prints in the snow proved that the prisoner, instead of following the track leading to the Nyack turnpike, fol-

lowed in his rival's path—*followed*—because his foot-prints were just over the other's—until a lack of snow left the trace indistinct, and he turned off to the cart track through the thicket, just above where the murder was committed. After that he was seen to leave Nanuet alone and in much excitement. When arrested, but one chamber of his rifle was empty, and the wound was caused by such a ball.

And the prisoner? How quietly he sat, as though he were listening to some other man's trial than his own, save for those strangely blood-shot eyes that turned now and then from the bench to search through the crowd and end—always end—upon that veiled figure in the far end of the gallery. As the trial advanced, the pallor upon his face began fluttering, flashes of feverish color tinged the thin cheeks, only to die away again in that intense death-like paleness that told of extreme suffering.

It was strange how his mind wandered, too. Now this attention was centered upon the trial—his trial—and he leaned slightly forward as though he were growing deaf and could not

easily catch the words. Then, his eyes turning upon the silent figure in the gallery, he wondered vaguely sometimes, sometimes with vivid comprehension, as to who this still, graceful, heavily veiled woman could be. And then, growing more and more careless of what passed around him, he began counting aimlessly the windows and the panes of glass and the faces before him; this blending confusedly with the voice of the speaker and the evil of jealousy, descending through many generations, to blot and cloud a life hitherto so honorable that never a murmur of wrong could be breathed upon it.

And again he caught the words at the bar. And still that silent, proud figure sat in the darkening gallery, with its face veiled securely from chance eyes. And those panes in the long windows and the eager faces pressed behind one another in every direction, mingled and grew confused in his mind.

Then a stir through this sea of faces, as though some mighty wind had touched them; and a silence like the hush of death; and then, in some unaccountable fashion, the words of the judge,

distinctly uttered, yet dulled to his ears, struck through this confusion, aud he knew vaguely, scarcely caring, that he was delivering his charge to the jury. And by and by, after what seemed but an instant's space of time to him, his mind seemed to so easily grasp the vastness of time, but which was in reality full five hours, the jury returned.

And now this blurring sea before him—the windows, the panes of dingy glass, the glimmer of lightly lying snow, the whispering of winds along the tree-tops, the mighty death-like silence of waiting for some great event; then out of this—not a breath—not a rustle—perfect silence —sounded the foreman's voice, and he knew—

CHAPTER IX.

AFTER THE TRIAL.

And all through this blur and confusion of mind—through the death-like silence over the crowded room—through the glimmer of snow—out of all this Hilton knew that he was—*not guilty*.

After that, silence for one instant, and then—what a shout went up from the crowd. They were moved with the fickleness of the wind ; their hearts and sympathy were with the man who stood in the prisoner's dock, found to be charged with a crime of which he was—not guilty.

In the midst of this excitement, Roy Hilton stepped from the dock once more a free man, and many pressed about him to congratulate him, and, among these, his friends were first. Some of these scarcely recognized the pale, haggard,

stern-faced man who came through this trial so changed. For up to that time his life had been full of all that makes life good to hold, and this deadly cloud was the first to overshadow him.

Whitney, knowing how much he was suffering through the struggle to command himself, came down and made his way through the crowd. He drew Roy's arm through his and turned with him toward the door, forcing a way quietly but steadily through the crowd pressing, some with curiosity, some with kind words, about the man such a few minutes before standing with the balance swaying for life or death. He uttered no words of congratulation, but replied to the men and the earnest friends pressing around his client, but ere the young man was aware, they had passed the doors and were again in the open air under the late November sky—and he was free.

"Frank," he said, and his voice was hoarse in his effort for control, and from the excitement through which he had passed during the weeks of confinement. "Frank, who are they—those two women in the gallery? I saw them there.

You promised me that *she* should be kept away, and yet she is here—she saw and heard all that passed—the speakers and the—staring windows with their interminable panes—and the rustling of the leaves—"

His friend laughed with assumed lightness, still drawing the other down the steps and toward the closed carriage in waiting.

"Of what are you talking, Roy?" he asked, and though his voice was gay, there was a deep shadow upon his face and eyes. "You speak in riddles, my dear fellow. What have you to do with these women who come to see and hear this latest bit of gossip? The carriage is here, come. There is a train due in a half-hour and we must take it, and—"

But the young man would not be put off. He scarcely heard the other's words. His eyes were restlessly searching the faces about them. Then, as Whitney would have drawn him within the waiting carriage, he drew back impatiently, and the old fire returned to his eyes, as he met squarely the eyes of his friend.

"You would be kind, Frank," he said slowly,

as though to speak were new to him. "You think I am blind, perhaps. I saw those women. You need not expostulate with me, I have eyes and—a heart! Helen is here somewhere! It was she dressed in black—as though I were dead and she a widow! That this should have fallen upon me, and my wife be forced to come to my trial as though it were rather my burial! That they keep her from me, as though I were some polluted thing not fit for her to draw near to! Where is she, Whitney? I must speak with her!"

His eyes were wild, his voice hoarse and unnatural; his hands were clenched at his side as though he would master some powerful passion that could bring nothing but ill, should once it master him.

His friend, for one instant, was silent, unable to meet his swift words. He knew this young man's proud heart and great love for his wife. He knew—and so he had known from the first—that Helen Hilton was in that crowded court-room, waiting to hear with her own ears the decision for or against her husband. He had

done his best to keep her away—knowing how it would wound his friend—but the woman would hear nothing. That she was as nearly crazed by this blow to her husband's honor as he was himself, he saw clearly enough, and he dared not refuse her demand to be taken where she might at least know how the law went with the man she loved.

She came down that morning with her truest friend. She could never have been recognized by her own mother in the shrouding garments she wore, but the quick eyes of her husband pierced her disguise, and the pain his friend would have spared him, his wife, whom he loved, had laid upon his proud heart.

Perhaps the one sob, striking like a cry upon the great silence of the crowded room, had come from her—from the lips of the woman he loved! It must have gone hard with her to sit through what passed during the long hours of the trial! It must have been worse than death for her, so proud and loving, to sit in the stifling room and see and hear what she saw and heard!

He could not go away without seeing her! Some strange fatality seemed to fall upon him and warn him of what should be the outcome of this trial. He had been too happy, he whispered to himself, through set teeth, and fate would try him if he were strong enough to bear more trial! Some great sorrow was hanging over him, he knew as well as though the future had been laid bare before him, as he stood beside the carriage with his friend. There had come to him the conviction that he was to be proved through other means than this outcome of circumstantial evidence that had laid for a time the stain upon him of his rival's death.

To think that his wife—the proud, pure, beautiful woman who had given herself so gladly to his care when he asked of her her love and the return of his own—to think that she must sit in that gallery and listen to what they said about her husband, the man she loved with even more power, if that were possible, than his for her. To think that she should have mingled with that crowd of gossips and curiosity-seekers, and be brought to know she had been one among them

at a time when she should have been so far away as the world could place her—from his disgrace!

"As she is here, and you did not keep your promise to me, Frank Whitney, I must see her. I must and will speak with her, and tell her how false this is; that it is only the strangeness of circumstantial evidence that placed me in the prisoner's dock, with the world at liberty to speak of me as it will; with its power to wound her and place her under the same cloud as that laid upon her husband—unjustly, indeed, but still shadowing his honor and hers."

What could Whitney do, when he would have given a good ten years of his life to have spared this friend of his sorrow and humiliation? How could he force his friend to accede to his command and go with him, when he knew as well as the other that his wife was among this crowd, that she must come out ere many minutes, and there would be no hope of his keeping them apart, and so sparing both the pain of meeting in that place.

"If you are certain that your wife is here, Roy," he said quietly, under his breath, that the

curious eyes and ears about them should know nothing of what they spoke, "it will be better for us to go at once to the station, and there wait for her. She will, undoubtedly, take the next train down to the city, for she will not be anxious to remain here longer than necessary, any more than yourself. To meet her or speak with her here, where all of these people can know, would but place her in an awkward position."

Roy's eyes were upon his face, and the fire within them burned down to his very soul, as though he would prove whether or not this man who had so far been his good friend was to be trusted with his heart's happiness. Then he turned with him toward the carriage as quietly as though his heart were not beating madly and rebelliously.

"Undoubtedly you are right, Frank," he said, slowly, his hand trembling as he laid it upon the carrriage door ere entering, for the confinement and sorrow had changed him terribly in the eyes of this warmest of all his many friends. "You are always thoughtful of such appearances. I would have no stain laid upon *her*, or allow any

one to know that my wife—my wife—sat in that room to-day."

The bitterness in his voice struck oddly upon his hearer's heart. As they were rolling away toward the depot Whitney laid one hand upon his companion's arm, and leaning forward looked steadily in his flashing eyes. The pity and pain in his own in some way touched the young man's passionate rebellion.

"Roy, my dear fellow," he said, quietly and steadily, his hand pressed down upon the strong arm under his hold as though so he would impress him with his truth and sympathy. "My dear fellow, such words from you regarding the woman who loves you should make you blush to utter them. You know as well as I that it was her warm heart and her pity that brought her here to-day, and not the idle curiosity of those others—"

"But she should have obeyed my wish and remained away, where the disgrace of seeing me there—her husband—with the idle listeners waiting to know whether or not the law would say that an innocent man should bear the punish-

ment circumstantial evidence alone had laid upon his honor. How could she come? How could she wish to see me in such a false position—she, the woman I love and who has loved me so well —me, tried for the murder of her old lover?"

"You are not yourself, Roy," his friend answered, quietly, turning his gaze from the window of the carriage as they passed quickly along the street, where the threatened rain was at last falling, making the day dull and dark as the heart of his friend. "It is better not to talk upon this subject now. We might both of us say that for which we would be sorry when we had time for sober thought."

But Roy Hilton was not so to be quieted. He had been too long forced back upon himself to silence, struggle as he would for self-command, the restless cry against this that had come upon him at the very threshold of life!

"I cannot remember always the after-remorse of which you speak, Frank!" he cried, restlessly, his eyes now upon the other's face, now turned upon the dreary rain darkening the carriage-window. "I have borne enough, truly, without

this knowledge that my wife descends to witness her husband's degradation! I should have gone to her and thrown aside her disguise, and made her suffer, too, the bitterness which was upon me! If she would follow me here when it was my express wish that she should not do so, why should she not be made to bear with me the limit of my disgrace—"

"You are excited, Roy," Mr. Whitney said, gravely. "You are as free as on the day you entered the woods with us. There is not a question of that in the mind of any one listening to your trial."

"But I know better!" exclaimed Roy, fiercely, turning his eyes upon the kind face beside him. "I tell you, Frank Whitney, a man cannot bear what I have borne and go from it without a hint always lingering with him of what he has been made unjustly to suffer. These three weeks of imprisonment have changed me as, perhaps, you do not realize. I can never again go among my friends without feeling that this goes with me. Do you think I do not realize, as even you cannot do, what must come from it? They say I

am not guilty—and before God they speak the truth—but the knowledge that they believed me guilty until the jury found me otherwise, and that even yet there is uncleared evidence against me which must cloud my life!"

What could Frank Whitney reply? He knew that it was true that to Roy's proud sense of honor the memory of those three weeks behind prison walls, even though these walls were softened to a room in the sheriff's house, must forever cloud his life. But this was not Roy Hilton; this man crying against life and fate, and uttering words of harsh judgment against the woman he loved! The trial had done more than wound his heart; perhaps—who knew?—it had touched his mind as well!

"Well!" the lawyer knew not what to say, but he felt that neither of them could endure the silence that must ensue if this argument ceased, "we are at the depot, Roy. We will wait in the ladies' room for your wife. She will not be long behind us. The train is due in five minutes. Thank Heaven we have escaped the crowd and will get away quietly."

Roy did not reply, but left the carriage and entered the station like one in a dream. Should his wife come upon him, there and so, it would wound her loving heart, as, perhaps, he did not comprehend!

How swiftly the seconds ticked themselves away on the great clock upon the blank wall! One, two, three minutes passed, and, although they seemed like hours to those two men, yet, when they were gone and those for whom they waited did not appear, the flight of time seemed cruel.

Hark! Shrill and high, like the scream of some mad monster, rang out the whistle upon the dull, damp, dark air! It was clanging and rattling along the dull rails, as though to crush a human heart were but pastime under its mighty wheels. Again and yet again the piercing scream of its iron throat struck the dull air into quivering reverberation, dying along the woods dank with the coming rain, and fading off along the hills as though to mock the suffering of the heart whose bitterness had come through

the gray November woods where a dead man lay face downward upon the snow!

"The train is coming, Roy," the lawyer said, turning quietly to his companion, a swift light as of relief flashing in his eyes. "Come, my dear fellow. When once we have left this place behind us, we shall forget there ever was such a thing in the world as man's injustice!"

Roy shook his head doggedly. The color in his face was dull and deep, his eyes were restless and wild; he looked like a man walking in some feverish dream, not knowing where he had come or how it happened that so he was there.

Frank Whitney, meeting this peculiar expression in his eyes, started involuntarily, and crossed, without a sign of haste, to where the other still paced to and fro with those fiercely clenched hands at his back. He laid his hand in some authority upon his shoulder, and spoke distinctly as one might address a child.

"It is time for us to go, Roy," he said. "The train is here. Come."

Roy looked at him through the fiery haze upon his mind and heart, as though the memory of

who this might be were fast slipping from him. Then he shook his head. The one predominant thought could not be drowned even by fever heat.

"I shall wait for Helen," he said. "I cannot go until my wife comes. I promised to wait, you know."

For an instant the other fell back, biting his lips as though to silence any rash word. Then he forced himself to smile as one would smile upon a child to win its yielding.

"Helen has gone, Roy. You have forgotten. She is to meet you at home, you remember. She will not come here. If we miss this train, she will fear some accident has come to you. Let us go."

Still that dogged one idea in the brain that was fast yielding to the influence of the fever that had been so slowly but surely creeping upon the strong man during the confinement and excitement. He shook his head and drew back from the strong, kind hand upon his arm.

"I promised to wait for her here, you know. I couldn't go, really, till she comes. She was—

there, you know—and I said I would not go without her. It would be cruel for me to go after she came so far to hear what they should say of me—her husband!" He laughed low and half vacantly.

This, then, the other said, with a great pity in his heart, was what had so changed the man before him. This was the cause of his strange, harsh words of a woman he would have died for to spare her one hour's sorrow. This was what had come so near bringing the trial to a bad ending, through his client's strange lack of comprehension when made to answer his charge.

But there was no time to spare if they would take this train for home, and he would do much to get his friend away before his wife should come. So he smiled steadily into the burning eyes opposite him, and said, with forced lightness:

"What a fellow you are, Roy! Helen would laugh should she hear you. Surely, you remember that she said she would keep dinner waiting even two hours for our return. She would meet you there, not here. Come. If we miss this

train, we cannot get home until too late even for the two hours' delay."

Talking, he drew his companion toward the train, whose fierce, fiery engine was puffing and panting and breathing steam, as though restless at even that moment's delay in its swift rush along the rails through the mist and the fog of the storm. The warning-bell struck into ringing, and the puffing and panting ceased suddenly, as the monster prepared for another charge over the road.

Hilton's heart was dark with thought, as they entered the train; but how much darker, how much sadder he must have been, had he known of one stern-faced, shrewd-eyed woman who sat opposite the veiled woman and her companion in the crowded gallery, her thin, hard-featured face, and small, cold eyes now turned upon the woman across the house as though she would pierce through the heavy veiling and pry out the face behind them, now turned upon the scene below with intense interest, and an excitement under the heartless exterior that set the sallow pallor of death upon her face. And it was well, too,

that he did not know of the little side act in that corner of the gallery where this woman sat when the verdict was passed upon the prisoner.

The sallow pallor flushed to flaming color, and the small eyes glittered like points of steel; the whole face most sinister with its dark meaning.

"We shall see!" came from between her shut teeth in a hoarse whisper, her long, bony fingers clutching the fold of her shawl. "We shall see!"

Ay, it was well that he did not know!

CHAPTER X.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

The engine bell clanged, the mighty monster jerked and jolted the long line of cars at its back, and then out from the dingy little station it crept, and quickened into rapid flight along the rails, hidden, save a few feet ahead, by the fog and the rain.

"Thank God!" Frank Whitney said, under his

breath, as he passed with his companion through the car to a vacant seat forward. "I began to fear there was no help for a meeting. She promised she would take the other line, but I feared her woman's heart would play her determination false, and she would follow her husband. I cannot be too thankful for her truth."

But his companion, though fast yielding to the fever that had been born in his veins during the days of imprisonment, was still hard to convince of his friend's truth in asserting that his wife would not come to that station to meet him. Although he was very quiet after his fierce words in the carriage, the heat of his bitterness in those words, yet there was that in his face to draw considerable attention to him from the passengers. Perhaps they knew, or some of them, of the trial at Nyack. Perhaps they guessed that this man, with his flushed face and fiery eyes and dogged manner, had come through some mighty struggle or sorrow.

The landscape changed; thicker settlements and villages lay at the side of the tracks. They stopped once or twice at a busy station, but the

train was an express and dashed and rattled and swayed along its iron road as though its whirling wheels could not fast enough bear the passionate heart to the fulfillment of its suffering. Then, the open glimpses of marshy land; the distant glimmer of water, brick and mortar looming through the fog. Rattle and bang and thunder through the tunnel, then rattle and bang and rumble out into the light again, and the great monster slowly drew its length into the station.

Frank Whitney waited until the car was nearly emptied of passengers ere he addressed his companion, laying one hand upon Hilton's shoulder, as though the height of man's pity could not soften enough the pain in store for him.

"We are at home at last, Roy!" he said, quietly, forcing himself to smile upon the haggard face turned toward him. "It has been a tiresome journey down, but a safe one, after all, and we should be glad of that!"

Roy roused himself as though he had been in a dream. He rose and followed his friend un-

questioningly from the car, and so, arm in arm, they passed along the platform to the ferry.

"We will get there soon enough," muttered Frank Whitney to himself, with sudden savage impatience, as he followed his friend from the boat and into a cab, closing the door, after giving the address to the driver. "A mighty sight too soon to please me. It's a deuced bad business any way one can fix it, and I wish I were well out of it. If I were not his friend, or hers, it would not so much matter. Well, there's many a bitter pill, I suppose for all of us. I should be thankful it is not I who have the greatest suffering to endure."

Still, warm-hearted as he was, it was hard enough to know and witness the suffering of his friends, and feel so assured that, do what he might, he could in no wise soften or prevent it. He knew what was to come, so far as human power went, and he must still go with his friend to the old home, where he had been so infinitely happy and where the saddest blow of all would descend.

"If I thought," he said to himself, his brows

heavily drawn down over his troubled eyes—"if I thought I could detain him at my home and keep him there through this illness—"

He rang the bell and gave a new address to the driver.

"One can do no more than fail," he said grimly, his eyes staring out upon the bustle and noise of the street. "And I will do my best not to fail when his happiness is at stake. He will soon be out of the knowledge of this for a few days, I think, judging from his present state. Poor fellow! How strangely things have changed for him! One month ago I could have found it in my heart to envy him; *he* never knew more than did she what Helen Stuart was to me before she married him."

But when he reckoned to detain Roy at his home he did not take into consideration that this man's one thought was to return to his home, and even fever could not blind his eyes to the fact that they were at his friend's house, not his own. They left the cab and were in the house itself, the young man scarcely glancing at his surroundings as he hurried past his friend and

up the steps, but when once they were within and no Helen came to meet them, and no familiar sound or sight was there, Roy turned to the other in a passion, his excitement granting him strength.

"You are deceiving me, Frank Whitney," he cried, fiercely, his voice suffocated with anger. "You have not brought me to my home! My wife is not here as you said she would be—as she promised she would be. Perhaps you think I have no rights after the stain upon my name, and that it is best my wife should be kept from me. You do not know the man with whom you deal, if that is your thought! My wife can be as true to me, now that I have come back to her freed from that charge, as she was the day I went from her, and promised to return at night. But so you think—you and the world—that when once a man has borne the touch of disgrace, other men can do with him as they will, for he has no right, no home, no wife!"

His voice was low but quivering, with the intensity of his anger, and his fevered eyes flashed into those of the other, as though they

would burn his meaning to his very soul. How could he know to what depth he was wounding the heart that was but considering his own good?

Frank Whitney went close up to him and laid his hand upon his arm, as though he would soften his anger toward himself, as though he hoped so to prove what was in his heart—what infinite pity and sadness for his friend.

"Roy," he said, gently, and the quiet voice hushed the other's fierce excitement, "I brought you here, because I thought you would prefer meeting your wife here, to going at once to your own home: but if you wish it, we will go there, instead."

Anything for delay, he told himself—anything to kept this man unaware of the sadness awaiting him, until he should be incapable of comprehending what must so soon fall upon his already sore heart. Anything to keep from him, if but for the space of an hour, the pain knowledge must bring.

"You are sure she was to come here to meet me, Frank?" asked his friend, wistfully. And the other turned away his face, that he would not

betray its quivering to those sharp eyes. "You said she would wait at home for me, and you bring me here, and she is not here, and does not come, as she has always come when I have been absent."

"We will go to your home, then, Roy," was the quiet answer. "I would not have you doubt me. If you believe that I am deceiving you, we will go at once, that you may know how true a friend I really would be."

Was there something behind the quiet words? Was there a hint of the black shadow he had believed must fall upon him when he left the room where his disgrace had placed him? Did his friend know of what he spoke when he would delay his return to his home? Some blank place in his memory would not be filled at his effort to recall what this might be. Then he felt the influence of some shadowy, dark thing near his life, he believed, but what this was—whether it were in reality the non-appearance of his wife, or—

"Yes; let us go now—at once—home!" he said, restlessly, with those brilliant eyes alert for

the appearance of a form that did not come and a face that was out of sight. "If you are my friend, Frank Whitney, as you hope for happiness yourself, let us go at once."

"We will go at once," was the quiet reply, though a new, strange touch of pallor was upon the speaker's face. "Come, Roy."

CHAPTER XI.

WATCHING.

The cab was in waiting at the steps, for the lawyer had been uncertain of his success in this ruse to detain his friend, and ordered the carriage to wait for further orders. They entered it without longer delay, and were driven slowly further up the Avenue to Hilton's house.

Slowly the carriage rolled along the Avenue; very lingeringly they turned up to the steps before the handsome house of the Hiltons, very reluctantly the lawyer opened the carriage door, and descending assisted his friend to alight. He

paid the driver and then he followed the other up the broad steps and waited for the answering of the bell. With a heavy heart and a shadow in his eyes that warned an observer of his sorrow, he entered with the master, keeping beside him more from the wish to prove that there was companionship near than because he would witness the scene that must come.

"Is Mrs. Hilton not at home?" queried Roy, his voice so strange and hoarse the footman scarcely recognized it; but at a warning glance from the lawyer he replied quietly, as though it were an every-day affair—this absence of the mistress upon the strange home-coming of the master:

"Shall I see for you, sir? She may be in her rooms—"

"No!" Roy interrupted him, waiting for no further words, and hurried up the staircase as though he must satisfy himself of some distrust. "I will seek her myself, Johnson."

He did not know that his friend was following him. He had a dim comprehension that he was not alone, and that there was a strange silence

upon the house, but he could not define the sensation of wonder upon himself. His wife was undoubtedly in her room; he would go there first; she might not have known the time for their arrival. She was waiting for him somewhere in the rooms. If she were not in her room, then in some other. She was somewhere waiting for him; and he must find her.

But his wife was not in her boudoir when he sought her there. She was not in the inner room, nor in her dressing-room. He called her. There was no answer.

Even Roy Hilton's flushed face began to assume a pallor born of fear, blending so startlingly with the flush of fever, that it was terrible to see. His wife would have replied to his call, were she within hearing. She was always so ready to respond to his call upon her. He crossed the hall to his own suite of rooms, but she was not there. He had some half-defined hope that she might have waited for him there. He passed rapidly from one room to another. Nowhere, look where he would, could he find her.

Then when he searched the house in this half-wild fashion, his friend beside him, though not intruding upon his growing alarm, he returned to her boudoir once more, as though he could not even yet give up the hope of finding her somewhere within call, somewhere he could reach her.

"She is not here," he said, softly, to himself, still unconscious of his friend's presence. "She has gone out. Perhaps, knowing the time for the arrival of the train, she has gone to the ferry to meet me! I should have thought of that! She may have been late, and so we missed her! She will come, presently. I will wait for her here!"

He crossed the room, his footsteps making no sound upon the thick rugs, and as though he were in the presence of his wife and would not disturb her. There was a light blending with this strange, half vacant expression upon his face that wakened deepest pity in the heart of his friend, still within call, still not wishing to make his presence known.

At one of the long windows he stood for a

moment, looking down upon the avenue, his eyes searching as far as he could see for the carriage she might have taken to meet him at the station. Then, as no carriage appeared that could be hers, he sank down in her favorite chair at this window, and waited.

"She will be here presently," he said; and repeated this over and over at intervals, so confidently, yet still in that strange, dazed voice that made the hearer's heart throb with sorrow.

Knowing in what a state his friend was physically and mentally, Frank Whitney had sent a messenger at once with a note of explanation to the family physician, who at this moment appeared. He was a kind-hearted man, but the keen eyes were swift to see where mistaken friendship might fail to prove of benefit. He entered the room very quietly, after tapping at the door and receiving no response. He went up to the young man, as though he had but just parted from him.

"Eh, but this is a damp, disagreeable day, Roy," he said, rubbing his hands together, as

though it were good to be within doors upon such a day."

Roy turned his bloodshot eyes upon him questioningly.

"Waiting for your wife, I suppose," continued the older man, with no trace of concern upon his face. "That is the worst of marriage, Roy, my boy; we can never tell when the ladies will be at home. They forget the passing of time when calling and chatting together."

Roy glanced up swiftly.

"Yes—she is calling!" he said, slowly, but very distinctly, to impress the fact upon his hearer. "She will not be gone long. I have waited some time, but she will be in presently."

There was no betraying change upon the physician's face as he set down his small bag upon a table behind the young man, and chose therefrom some subtle powder, mixing this in a tiny glass half filled with water from the pitcher brought in when he came, unobserved by the young master. Then he returned to Roy's side and stooped over him for an instant.

"A deadly damp day, Roy. Makes a man

shiver just to look out upon the gray streets! This is good to drive away the effects of the day. Drink it, will you? I find it very effective."

He laughed easily and shrugged his shoulders as though it were an excellent joke that he discovered an antidote for the gray days. And utterly unsuspicious, half dazed with the fever and throbbing in his head and the struggle to fill that blank in his memory that could so easily have placed where his wife was, could he but remember—he took the glass in his trembling hand and drank the contents unmurmuringly.

"It'll do you good," declared the physician, still laughing as at a good joke, taking the emptied glass from the weak, lifted hand. "If you'll take advice, Roy, I should say for you to go into your room and lie down for a while. That is what one should do after taking this stuff. When you wake, you know, you will forget you ever had the blues from watching through the rain for your wife to return from calling. It'll make the time pass quicker, you know."

But the young man would not heed this

advice. He must wait there, in her chair, at her window, he said to himself, and though so obedient in drinking the physician's prescription, he utterly and doggedly refused to take this latter advice.

"Don't like the suggestion, eh?" said the jovial doctor, standing beside the young man's chair with assumed carelessness, though his keen eyes knew that before ten minutes should pass, this stubborn patient would be so utterly unconscious of even the absence of his wife as to leave it in his power to put him to bed, and keep him there if he would. "If you were one of us, Hilton, you would be amazed to know how many patients behave even worse than yourself —not that you are a patient, by any means, my dear fellow!" as Roy once more turned his eyes from the window to the face of the speaker. "But it is really a novelty to be obeyed so well as you obey me!"

Still he watched and waited with his keen eyes very kind; while the young man, leaning back in the great soft chair, kept his wavering eyes upon the Avenue by a powerful effort, for

the lids were beginning to droop and his mind was growing more and more vacant. "It would be but a short five minutes now," said the quiet doctor to himself, his gaze also straying out upon the broad Avenue. And so he waited, with a patience born of long endurance.

"She will—come—presently—" muttered the low voice, fading into incoherence, as the lids would no longer lift from the heavy eyes. "She will—come—"

CHAPTER XII.

TWO WOMFN.

Through the increasing bustle and excitement following the prisoner's acquittal, two women, dressed plainly and unobtrusively, with their faces veiled from chance curiosity, sat quite silent and motionless in the gallery. One leaned once toward her companion, as the crowd pressed about the released man, and whispered

with a quivering voice, so low that no other ear could catch the words:

"Heaven is merciful, as I prayed it should be, Kitty. How could they believe him guilty?"

While, for answer, the other pressed the small white hand she held, and patted it, as though she were soothing a child.

They walked from the close, stifling room, so packed but a half-hour before, out through the falling rain, to the carriage that was drawn up for them immediately upon their appearance. The driver descended from his box, and opened the door, assisting them to enter, and closing it upon them, the fluttering green curtain before the window hiding them from the curious eyes. Then he mounted his seat, and, whipping up the horses, whirled them away. He had his orders from the prisoner's counsel, perhaps—who knew?—and a fee, besides, from the same source, that bound him body and soul to the service of his fare.

But once out of sight of the crowd; once away from the room where the handsome stranger stood in the prisoner's dock, with his

haggard face and feverish eyes and half-bewildered manner—once away from this, shut from curiosity by the closed doors and shielding curtain, the rumble and jolting of the carriage, the stern repression this one of the two women placed upon herself, gave way utterly, and shrinking back in her corner among the cushions, after flinging aside her veil, she covered her face with her ungloved hands, trembling and sobbing.

Her companion, her veil still over her face, as though she would be ready for chance necessity, bent toward this small, shrinking woman, with infinite pity in the action, as she said, with forced calmness, for she, too, had been marvelously moved by the scene at the court-room:

"You must not give way like this, Helen, dearest. You will make yourself ill weeping. Of what use are tears? He is free. Why should you fear?"

Helen shook her head desolately.

"You wish to be kind, Kittie," she said, forcing herself to speak steadily, that her words should be audible through the roll of wheels and

her excitement. "You would comfort me if you could, but you do not know—oh, indeed, you do not know."

The other patted her shoulder affectionately, as she held her within her arms.

"I think you will be better when once you arrive at home, dear," she said, steadily, a gravity in her voice that betrayed she spoke other than she felt. "When you are again at home, and he is there, and all this sorrow has passed—"

"But that is it!" cried the other, piteously, lifting her white face and reproachful eyes. "That is it, Kittie. You do not understand. How could you? It is only they and I who know what is to come out of this wicked, wicked charge against him. They made me go away when they heard it. They took me from our dear home. How could I stand out against them when my heart was so sore? They said I should not remain there after—this. That it was unjust and cruel for any one to believe against him made no difference to them. They said the stain was there—the stain of imprisonment! That our name is too high and too proud ever

to be sullied! That he has not even yet been cleared beyond suspicion! They said I am but a child—and, oh, perhaps I am, Kittie, dear Kittie, but I am still his wife!"

She broke of in her bitter cry, and again covering her face with her hands, convulsively laid her head upon her friend's shoulder and moaned in a hushed fashion, that hurt her companion more than the wildest cry could do.

"Yes; there, there, dear, you must cheer up," said Kittie. "You must not give way like this, Helen, dear! Of course you are his wife. No one disputes that! Who could, indeed? Are there two happier people in the world than yourself and your husband—"

"But you don't know—you don't understand," interrupted the dark-eyed woman, with sudden vehemence, starting from the soothing arm about her and drying her tears as though tears were truly a weakness at such a moment and only light affections could be moved by them.

"They have not told you, Kittie—I have not told you because I could not bring myself to utter the words before, but now you will know

anyhow. Since this has come to us—to my husband and me—they say that we can never any more be to each other what we have been; that I am under age still and owe them obedience, even though I may be married; that they command me to give up my husband—to leave his house—our house, where we have been so happy—and if I will not hear of a divorce they command me to agree to a separation until he has been proved beyond a doubt, even beyond the possibility of a doubt, not guilty of this crime, and the true murderer has been brought to light!

"It was hard—it was cruel, Kittie, for them to come to me at such a time, knowing what my husband is to me, but I was so weary of their arguments, so utterly unable to struggle with them, that at last they took me with them and have forced from me a promise—I don't know when or how, but they say I have passed my word—never again to return to my home with him until he has been proved innocent or until they see no cause why I should not return.

"How I could have ever yielded to them in this I am not able to comprehend; but I do not

know half that has passed during these dreadful weeks. They say I promised, and they would not say untruth. I suppose I must have yielded from sheer weariness of their urging. They hold me to my word anyway. I came here to-day only because I would not be deterred, promising that you should come with me, and that no word should pass between my husband and myself, and that no one should know who the veiled woman is."

She lifted her head as proudly as though there had never and could never be hint of stain upon one near or dear to her. The proud blood of many a generation was in her veins, and there could nothing lower the lifted head or cause the steady eyes to fall with shame.

Kittie spoke no word. She knew her friend better than to think of such a thing. She knew that this haughty woman, with her pride and love and honor, would listen to no word uttered against either her husband or her people. If so being she had passed her word to hold herself apart from him, she would keep that word to the death. If they would grant her no leave to

return to the home where so much of happiness had come to her, she would still live her life, and hold herself true to the blue blood descending to her from the days of old. Though her heart might break, it could of necessity never bend.

Presently the low voice resumed:

"They told me this when I would have gone to him upon learning what must come from the suspicion resting upon him. They held me to my promise, though it might have been uttered under such stress of weariness and excitement as made me irresponsible for what I uttered. I remained away, and Frank Whitney said it was his wish. He would have kept from me any hint of this trouble.

"I went to Frank, when they told me of what I had promised, and he also assured me, although not until I forced him to tell me, that I had indeed uttered the words they said at home that I had uttered. I yielded to them, and never can I go back to him until the murderer is discovered or until they grant me leave."

She sat very still now, her hands clasped in her lap, her eyes upon nothing in reality, seeing

only what her heart and memory painted too distinctly. Her companion dared not offer her sympathy. She dared not break through the proud reserve wrapped so unmistakably about the young wife.

"It was hard as death to sit there and hear what they said of him, knowing that I could not go to him," said the quiet voice. "When they set him free and declared that the circumstantial evidence, although strong in its way, was yet not powerful enough to convict him, and he came away with his one truest friend, who knows how hard it was for me—for me, his wife—to sit apparently unmoved and let him go and never to utter one word of sympathy or trust—to know that a barrier as strong as death and cruel as even prison bars, kept me from him—that he, so changed, so saddened, so ill, must go away with his only friend, and I, his wife, must still sit there among those idle watchers, saying nothing, revealing nothing but an idle curiosity—I could have killed myself for very shame of it! I hated myself so thoroughly—I despised myself for having yielded to their persuasion!"

Silence fell between them. Only the rumble of the wheels upon the stones broke the utter hush. The curtain flapped and swung as the carriage swayed in their hurried pace.

"It was cruel to let him go away with that terrible look upon his face!" murmured the sweet voice by and by, as though communing with herself and forgetful of her companion. "It was not as his wife should have done. I should have gone to him there—before all those people—and comforted and sustained him. I acted like a coward, shrinking in that dark place in the gallery, hidden from all eyes, veiled as though ashamed of him! Only a coward would have ever placed such an alternative upon herself!"

"But there is not the faintest trace of cowardice in you, dearest," ventured her companion, quietly. "You should not utter such a thought. No one would or could believe it of you."

The large, steadfast eyes turned upon the speaker for an instant in intense scorn. Then she answered coldly:

"You say that to comfort me, Kittie. You

utter the conventional words you think are required of you when you could not wound me more than by such words. Would *you* have let him go had you been in my place, Kittie Belaire? Could *you* have remained in your safe hiding and see him go away with the trace of suffering greater than words could tell upon his face?"

"But you could not break your promise, dear," said Kittie, gravely.

The other laughed bitterly.

"No; I could not break my promise," she said, steadily. "I could not stain my honor with a broken word, but I could stain my conscience by shrinking from sharing his suffering and pain. It was well for me to yield to such weakness as placed me beyond the right to fulfill the commands of the church books and divide with my husband the honor or ill, the better or worse that might come! It was well that I should forget the commands placed upon me when I promised to love and honor him always! It is what the world would hold as just, that he should alone bear the punishment of guilt if he is guilty or until he is proved other-

wise. Our law commands that a man shall be considered innocent until he is proved guilty. But do we in social life always hold to that? Should his wife fall below the par of the law? Or, doing so, shall she not always feel scorn of herself?"

The rumble of the wheels grew fainter; the carriage halted; the driver came to the door, and, opening it, informed them, with quiet respect, that they were at the station and that the down train would be along within a quarter of an hour. He assisted them to alight with not a sign of curiosity to discover who they might be—they had their right to privacy, he said to himself, later—for both were as deeply veiled when the door was opened as when he closed it upon them and their grief or happiness.

CHAPTER XIII.

A GLIMPSE AT A HURT HEART.

The fifteen minutes passed while the two women sat in the waiting-room, and the train coiled itself for a moment at rest beside the platform as they, with others, entered. Very silent the two sat through the journey to the city. As the two men rode on the other line with their busy minds and silent lips, so these women went upon their own way. An endless way it seemed to them. Not that there would come to them any pleasure in arrival at home, but from the human heart's impatience when it beats to the touch of pain.

Another line they traveled, but ending in the Pennsylvania Depot, and theirs being a shorter route and their train an express, they arrived

some minutes sooner than the two travelers from the same scene and place.

"We will wait until they come—and go," said Helen, with a strained, still voice, laying her hand upon her companion's arm, the veil still screening her face from curious eyes. "I cannot speak to him, I am not allowed to go near him, but who can keep me from looking upon him when he passes? He will never know how his wife stood aside where she would not be seen and watched for his coming—and going! He may, perhaps, think that she does not care—he will undoubtedly believe she is false to her vows when he learns the truth—but while he still believes me true I shall watch him pass and then return to the house and utter no word, and show by no sign that it is not my free will so to do!"

Her eyes were brilliant and flashed even through the thick folds of her veil. Beautiful eyes they must be, some of the passers-by thought, catching a glimpse of them as they came and went in the hurry of the crowd. Beautiful eyes that should not be so hidden under heavy folds of black. Beautiful eyes, indeed, but they did

not falter in their steady searching for the one among the many streaming from the train. Through all time and place they could never mistake the one face and form for which they watched.

A changed face. Pallid and flushing and pale again, with the fevered, restless eyes noting nothing in passing, the half vacant expression striking terror to the woman beyond his gaze standing to see him pass! A face so changed by confinement and suffering, physical and mental, that it might have gone unrecognized by a less eager eye. How could he guess, hurrying to reach his home where his wife awaited him, that the woman he would so soon hope to see was shrinking from his sight to let him pass without a word or look to betray what she, too, was suffering?

When they were utterly out of sight in the ferry-boat and steaming away, she turned with supreme calmness to her companion. No quiver in her voice; careless of him, it would seem, from all proof she gave to the contrary, a woman with

marvelous self-command, and a pride that might some day crush out her life.

"If you are ready, we will go now, Kittie," she said, quietly. And gathering the folds of her veil a trifle closer about her face, she calmly entered the other ferry-boat.

Kittie Belaire made no reply, uttered no word, save to give the direction to the driver of the carriage they engaged upon the New York side.

A home where wealth and taste were upon everything—was this to which they were going. A proud family and proud blood and proud hearts. Kindness of heart, where kindness of heart did not interfere with what the world might say, or what it might demand of these members of it and its blue blood society. Good intentions that failed utterly to recognize a demand when the best of the city's men and women refused to know there should be such. Pride in the beautiful daughter who went from them to another home and family as high as their own. But when once the shadow of prison bars struck upon this man– most to be envied, the world

said—pride for her would have broken her heart and have called it just, without one pang of pity or remorse. Perhaps they would indeed far rather have her heart unmindful of life, stop its throbbing and be cold in death, than live and bear or reflect upon them and their pride, the stain upon her husband's name.

She knew to what she was returning as the carriage rolled slowly up-town. She knew what must be her fight to overcome the mighty will set against her heart's desire. She knew that it was an almost impossible thing to be granted —the wish in her heart to return to her husband, that she might know beyond doubt that this was no terrible illness coming upon him that struck such fever into his face. She would go back to her home directly she knew there was no harm falling upon him. She would keep her promise so far as that. She would, indeed, if so they demanded, not even speak with him, if only she might be assured there was no harm to him.

When, at last, the carriage stopped at the steps, and they entered the house, neither woman uttered what was in her heart,

Helen threw off her veil, and in the close-fitting black gown that outlined her slender, graceful figure perfectly, went alone to the library at the lower end of the hall, and closing the door upon entering, passed from her friend's sight for many a long day.

Her father was in the room. She knew she would find him there. It was his favorite place at that hour. She had been certain she would find him or she would not have entered. She could not endure to meet others under her present excitement. He was sitting before the grate, where a cheery fire blazed softly, touching the engravings and the paintings upon the walls and the rich hangings into rosy hues—blood red, she thought, shuddering.

But he was not alone! She started even in her haste and excitement when she saw his companion. She would sooner have died—the thought passed through her mind for one instant as she paused just inside the closed door—than have entered in her black dress and with her pallid face where this other man was. He knew this as well as she, and a gleam came into his

eyes, but not a muscle of his face betrayed his feeling. He scarcely glanced at her, but even in the slight turning of his eyes upon her, as she glided into the room like a beautiful phantom, he knew exactly how pale and wan-faced and proud she was. He exulted, too, in his heart, knowing this. For he loved her. He loved her until his love was changed to evil when she had rejected his suit.

She, with a woman's instinct, shrank as she saw him; but he would not know what she felt, meeting that swift glance from his black eyes. She stood as proud and slender and self-possessed, with her hand still upon the handle of the door, as though, indeed, she expected to meet him there, or as though he were utterly away.

"You are fatigued, Mrs. Hilton," he said, rising and offering her a chair drawn up beside her father, where the firelight struck invitingly. "These late autumn days are disagreeably suggestive of winter. Be seated, pray."

"Thank you," she said, very quietly, but coldly, as always she addressed him. "I do not

SHE BENT OVER HIM.—*See Page* 137.

care to be seated, Mr. Carleton. I came in to speak with my father. I will leave you again."

"Pray do not do that," he hastened to say, that strange gleam in his eyes not resting on her face. "I was just about to leave, Mrs. Hilton. Your father and I were but going over an old argument."

He turned away, offering his hand to her father, and then, bowing with apparent deep respect to her, went quietly from the room, satisfied with his glimpse into her hurt heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

PLEADING.

When he was gone she stood for a moment quite still before her father, guessing what was the subject of their conversation, her eyes upon him, so unmoved and unmoveable in his arm-chair, with the red light from the coals touching his white hair and stern face. Then, still stand-

ing in that hushed attitude, fighting down her heart, she spoke.

"Father," she said, and the low voice, perfectly steady, helped him to guess of what she would speak, "father, I have kept my promise. I heard him pronounced 'not guilty.' I did not go near him. He went away with his friends; I came away with mine. So far I have not broken my word. But I have come to you now, father," the softness of a prayer in her low voice, "to ask of you this thing: He is ill, father. Will you say that I, his wife, may go to him, if but for one moment of time, to know how it is with him? To ask if only he is not suffering physically, as I know he is, in his heart believing that I have failed him when he most needs me? Will you remember the time when you and my mother were young, and the decree of the world was not so strong with you as it is now? Will you say that your daughter, who has always obeyed you, may be released from her promise long enough to know if her husband is well and able to bear this last blow? I know that he is ill, father! I saw it in his face. I

have been true to you, father, always! Be kind to me now when my happiness is gone from me and there is nothing for which I should live but to pray for the day to hasten when I may return to him and prove that I was not false!"

He was not a hard man at heart, did he but leave room for that to throb naturally under his shield of pride. He remembered how short a time before it was that she had not left the home for that of another; what a dutiful daughter she always was! He looked up to her, standing before him in her sombre dress with her beautiful face pallid with grief, the brilliant eyes afire with her pleading—erect, proud, self-possessed.

He looked up at her standing there in the rosy glow, so white and wan and proud. She was his daughter, but the world must not be flouted.

He shook his white head, and the stern lips under the gray mustache set still more sternly, as though he would stifle the words that would rise from his heart if he would.

She did not cry out. Very gently and quietly she knelt down beside him, clasping her little

hands upon the arm of his chair, and so lifted to his her large, dark eyes—larger and darker through her suffering. Very softly and low were the words uttered that rose from her heart.

"Father, I am your daughter, but his wife! To you I owe honor and obedience; to him I have passed my word with the sanction of the church and the world! Would you have me fail him now, when most he needs the care of one who loves him? It is so little that I ask—only to go to him and tell him that I am not false to my oath, that I am kept from him only because of words uttered without my own knowledge. I will come back to you when I have told him this, and never until he is proved free of touch of evil will I again go to him!"

Could he refuse her? How proud he was that day when she became Roy Hilton's wife! How the world praised him and them. There was no touch of ill upon them then, and he would have given this beautiful daughter to no other man so willingly, not even to her other suitor, her old school-fellow, their murdered

friend. And could he still refuse her? He looked into the sweet, wide, dark eyes with their pleading and their truth, into the pure, pallid face, such a short time ago so flushed with happiness, and—could he still refuse her?

She knew his consent was won. It was seldom she pleaded with him, but she knew the grave, stern face well enough to read the lines of relenting. She looked into his eyes, and a light crept into her own, a soft touch of color drove away for the moment the pallor from the cheeks, a ghost of a smile for an instant stirred the red lips.

"You know that I cannot refuse you this," he said slowly, and still very sternly, as though he would fight with his heart against the will of the world. "You know what you have been to me always, Helen. Remember the proud blood in your veins and what is due your position in society; remember the promise you have made regarding your future, and then you may go. In two hours, when you have accomplished your errand—" he could not bring himself to utter the name of her husband, although how proud

he used to be to utter it—"you will return. Do not forget whose daughter you are, nor the name you used to bear!"

He turned aside his head, not to see the gladness flushing her face, not to meet the bright eyes, not to know of the red, quivering mouth of the woman who was his daughter and the wife of the man accused of the murder of his friend.

But she would not be so turned aside; if he was proud, so was she. She did not offer him a caress, nor utter one word of thanks. For one instant she laid her warm red lips upon the stern, firm fingers resting upon the chair arm beside her, and then rose as proud and still and beautiful as when she entered.

She went from the library to her room—her old girlhood's room—and arranged in its most becoming manner the soft hair about her head, and the bit of velvet and feathers of a bonnet, and with a wrap over the darkness of her gown, went down to the carriage which she ordered from the stables ere she went up to her room. She saw no one but her father and the footman,

for she could not bring herself to go to her mother's room, where she knew she would meet with new opposition; but went down very quietly to the waiting carriage and was driven as swiftly as possible to the dear old home in which she had been so happy, in which, too, so much sadness had fallen upon her.

Johnson, the footman, betrayed no surprise at seeing her. Every servant in the house was too well trained for that. He replied to her inquiry for his master as quietly as she asked. Learning that the lawyer was still in the house, she asked to be taken first to him; and at that moment, Frank Whitney, having seen her arrival, came down the stairs to meet her. She gave him no explanation for her presence before the servant; but when they were alone in the upper hall, ere they entered her room, she asked of him if her husband were very ill; and he, knowing that she was not to be deceived, replied very gravely that he was at that moment tossing upon the bed in the height of a dangerous fever, and that they were forced to let him remain in her own room,

as he could not be quieted when they attempted to remove him to his own.

Then they entered where the sick man lay, when she had asked and gained his promise to send word to her father of the condition of her husband, and to state that, as it was impossible for her to fulfil her errand while her husband was in such a dangerous condition, she would, still keeping to the letter of her promise, remain and nurse him until he should recover, or until—

She could not bring herself to utter what would come to her mind, but went ahead of this friend very quietly, as though she never left it, her black dress brushing the heavy carpet and her footsteps noiseless upon it.

She did not start or change color when she saw the change upon the face resting on the pillow, though a great change had crossed it during the short time that elapsed since she waited at the station to see him pass. Fever was burning deep color into the sunken cheeks, and the blue eyes were shot with fever, moving restlessly about the room, while the low voice muttered constantly broken snatches and inco-

herent words that brought the swift tears to the dark eyes of the woman crossing so softly the thick carpet.

She bent over him, after standing motionless for one moment, gazing down upon the changed face, and as she laid her cool, soft cheek against his, he muttered her name and that of his old rival, a dark look on his face.

CHAPTER XV.

THROUGH HOURS OF WATCHING.

Frank Whitney, standing at the door, saw a change cross Helen's face ; and, although he did not catch the words so faintly uttered, he knew well enough what Roy's ravings were like, to guess that it was this so affecting her. Crossing the room and standing beside her, he laid his hand kindly but firmly on her arm. If she would be with the patient, she must command herself ; but he could not forget that he loved her before she became Roy Hilton's wife. He

did not love her now; he was too honorable for that, and had too strong control of his character; but he must always remember what she had been to him. The great pity in his face and voice struck upon her heart most gratefully.

"Poor fellow!" he said, softly. "Poor Roy! You cannot know through what he has passed within these three weeks, Mrs. Hilton. Being his friend, it has made my heart ache many times, going to him as I was able to do. It will take our best care to bring him safely through this illness."

Helen Hilton drew herself up to her full height, which left her only to her companion's shoulder, and her large dark eyes flashed with proud spirit, and her red lips shut over any cry there was in her heart. Would this old friend presume upon their friendship to fling before her always her fault of having yielded to the persuasion of her parents and leaving her husband's home, when all the evidence, so far as they could discover, was so black against him? Could he not comprehend what it was to her, and how sorely against her will she yielded?

He should know her well enough to be certain of that.

"Merciful Heavens!" whispered the weak voice, as the flushed face upon the pillows turned away from them, the unseeing eyes brilliant with fever. "And he loves her still—he dares tell me that he loves her still—"

The lawyer glanced hastily at the woman beside him to know if these words startled her as the others had done. His own face was immovable in expression, though very pale, and there was that in his eyes that might have startled the sick man's wife indeed, had she seen it. But she did not see it. She conquered her weakness, after those first words of delirious lips, and now she leaned, very white and proud and tender, over the flushed face turning upon the pillow, as though she would keep from other and less loving ears such words as these. Very softly and gently she laid her cool hand upon her husband's hot forehead and brushed back the fair hair, whispering to him some fond, foolish words of her love and care.

The lawyer turned away when he saw that

this woman still was true to herself and her husband, and leaving the room as noiselessly as he entered, he went into an adjoining room to wait until Roy Hilton's wife should come to him, as he knew that she would do when opportunity came, and he must see her before he left the house.

It was fully an hour later that Helen Hilton came to him from the sick-room, very pale and still, but proud and beautiful and womanly as ever. She came straight across the long room and up to this her husband's friend and her own. She held out her hand with a passionate gesture, held in check only by her strong will. Her large eyes looked larger and darker in the soft light of the room. Her red lips were parted, and a half smile rested upon them, but not a quiver of fear or unbelief. Her dark head was as proudly erect as though never a stain of crime rested upon her husband's name or so fallen upon her own.

"Frank," she said quietly, but with an intensity in her very quietness, her brilliant eyes upon his. "Frank, I have come to you to tell you

what it is to me to know that my husband has such a friend as yourself in this time of need. I have nothing to offer as an excuse to you for my harsh conduct in leaving his home and my own because of this—wrong done him. You know that I went away and gave my promise never to return until he shall have been proved so innocent that not a stain can touch his name. But I forced from my father the consent to come here and tell my husband with my own lips that I did not go away because *I* believed him guilty. I have never from the first moment of this terrible charge believed one word of it. Am not I his wife? Could his wife believe that?"

Yes, yes, this was the woman he had loved, this was not the proud, cold, worldly woman who left her husband's home when calamity fell upon him, to rid herself if so she might, of the humiliation. This was in truth Roy Hilton's wife, and as true and good and beautiful as on the day he married her.

"I know," continued this proud woman, with her unfaltering face turned to his, "I know as well as you and they know, that even though the

judge and jury acquitted him, there still remains a doubt of his innocence. Not in my mind—never think that his wife would acknowledge his being other than innocent—but there is enough against him in spite of this decision, that leaves them at liberty to doubt the correctness of the verdict. I could never rest, knowing this. Never while it remains, will my father or my mother allow me to take back my promise and return to his home. There must something be done to prove beyond doubt that he did not—murder—our friend.

"You wonder, Frank Whitney, that I can speak upon this subject so quietly. One can do anything when once one has made up one's mind so to do. There are many in spite of that enthusiastic reception of the verdict, there are many in that town, there are those even in this city—who believe or declare they so believe, my husband guilty. Even with George's own people, this doubt must live until utterly *proved.* I do not blame them. For such a man—so noble, so young and true—he was my old play-fellow, remember, Frank!—to be so murdered,

would rouse the pity and indignation of any one knowing him. There is certain evidence against my husband, and this must be cleared away. If—if clearing this away should prove to his harm"—she did not falter from meeting his eyes, although a deadly pallor struck across her face and those brilliant eyes were wide with terror—"still we must sift the matter to the utmost extent of the law. Nothing shall remain undone that can by any power upon earth cast a shadow upon the brave old name and proud old blood of the Hiltons! Nothing shall be left undone to clear from the minds of George's people the hint that my husband—I, the friend always, always Frank Whitney of this young man so murdered—*I*, on the part of my husband, declare that nothing shall go by that can prove the truth."

She looked capable of conquering the world as she so stood before him, and his eyes proved his admiration for her spirit and determination.

"Wait one moment, Helen," he said, earnestly, a slow flush dawning in his face. "You know as well as I that there is no dependence to be placed upon the ravings of fever, and what Roy

says now has no possible weight. One has peculiar fancies when one is under the influence of fever. The words Roy uttered in our presence doubtless arise from the excitement and incidents of the trial. That is the last coherent remembrance he had, and, consequently, he will speak of it in delirium. You are not to think—"

"I had no such thought, indeed," interrupted Helen, hastily. "I speak from what I have thought during these terrible days of waiting, and from what was said and done in the court-room to-day. As you know, I went there against your wish and that of my husband, but only because I would be certain as to the truth and evidence brought to bear for or against him. I must know what was to come. I would have him proved innocent, but also know for myself that there was not a hint of guilt upon him. I knew that this was necessary, if ever I would return to my husband's home. You know my people as well as I. So long as there remains doubt of my husband in this horrible murder, they would not allow me to take back my promise and return to him. I

could not ask it, knowing that I would but be refused.

"What we have to do, Frank Whitney—and you are his friend as well as mine—is to work in some powerful way—some way which money will open—to discover the true murderer, though it takes a fortune to do it. I must know, and—I *will!*"

She drew back from him, magnificent in her pride and her passion, calm though she kept her voice. Her dark eyes flashed like fires as they were raised to his. Her red lips shut with remarkable determination over the last words. Her dainty head was lifted like a queen's. There was no hint of ill upon her name or honor. There should be none upon that of her husband.

Her husband's counsel stood regarding her for a moment in silence, as though—the frown deepening upon his brow—as though to be very certain that she was to be trusted. His eyes were unusually keen and stern, meeting those eloquent lifted eyes of his friend's wife. He let her withdraw her hands from his, and turned from her after this close scrutiny, forgetful, she

thought, looking after him, of her presence. But she was not a woman easily to be forgotten, and he had not forgotten her. He turned from her, this deep frown of perplexity and thought upon his brow, and paced the room.

There was some indescribable change upon his face, and a pallor unnatural to this self-contained man of the world. But he went up to her and did not flinch from her passionate eyes, and the frown was gone from his face. Very quietly and distinctly he spoke. She listened to him in that proud, still manner of hers, that came only with this deadly charge upon her husband. Her mind was clear to comprehend his meaning, and her pride was equal to his. Long and earnestly they talked in the still room, with only the dull rumble of wheels and the low murmur of the wind at the windows waking the silence.

And when they returned to the side of the patient, there was a gravity upon both that fell during that time of conversation, upon the outcome of which Roy Hilton's fate must hang.

As Helen bent over her husband's bed to see that he was indeed sleeping, as his closed eyes

led her to believe, they opened suddenly upon her with the vacant stare that chilled her heart to see; and starting up in bed, trembling with his excitement, he whispered hoarsely, clutching her arm to draw her down the better to listen:

"And I tell you—any man who dares breathe—insult to her—may hold his life—cheaply—in my hands!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE "NEW MAN."

A rough looking, roughly dressed, roughly speaking man passed through Nanuet, a short time before so stirred by the murder and consequent trial. He was harmless-looking enough, but was taken by many for a tramp; and tramps were not admitted into the good graces of the village. He created little notice. Whether he came on foot or by rail, who knew? Who would have cared, had they known?

He passed along the road through the village,

and a few remarked him; that was all. He inquired the way to old Hardman's farm, from one or two of those whom he met, saying that he heard the old man desired a farm-hand and he would be glad of the place if he could suit. That somewhat roused the curiosity of those questioned. They believed he would not suit, but what was it to them, after all?

So it was, that, by and by, he came to the Hardman farm, through the woods, taking the cart track as directed, and turning half way through down a hollow to the left, came out upon the farm, facing a clearing in the desolate wood. A prosperous-looking place enough in itself, but evidently kept with closest care for the sole money value. The new-comer's keen gray eyes noted everything within sight as he walked up the path made by feet coming and going—not by hands for adornment. There was nothing for mere adornment in the yard about the plain, white, unshuttered house, staring with its blue-shaded windows upon the wood. There was an orchard to the right; the barns and out-buildings to the left; and beyond these stretched

the fields and gardens, ending afar off in the dense wood. That was all.

"I suppose they'll give a fellow enough to eat, even if they don't overpay him," muttered the stranger, swaggering up to the door at the rear, where only a plank served as porch. "They'd have to feed them enough to get work out of them! Guess the old man knows enough for that, if he is so precious close. There is no profit in starvation!"

His rap on the outer door was at first unanswered, but when repeated a second and third time, a harsh voice—evidently a woman's voice—called from within, asking who was there. When he replied that it was some one sent to see Mr. Hardman, the voice only grew more harsh in retorting that the man he wished to see could not be bothered; he was not in the house, and it would be impossible to say when he *could* be seen.

Nothing daunted, the stranger made answer that he then would wait till the old man came back, and sauntered out toward the barns, his hands in his pockets, whistling carelessly. This,

the owner of the harsh voice evidently perceived, for presently the door was opened a very little way as the tall, hard-featured, sinewy woman, pressing her figure in the aperture thus made, called to him to come back and wait—if he was a-going *to* wait—in the kitchen there.

Easily divining that it would bring him no good to get the woman's ill-will, he turned about and sauntered back with the air of one accustomed to roughness of speech and action, and, therefore, not at all put out by them; and when the door was opened sufficiently to admit him, he passed into the large bare room, and the door was quickly closed. Then the woman turned upon him, eying him with her cold, shrewd eyes, and inquired in a lower tone, but with the same unrelenting sternness, for what he wished to see old Hardman. She was his niece and might do as well. Her uncle was pretty busy just then with getting all things ready for the winter. He was somewhere about the farm, perhaps; perhaps he had gone away; he was often called away.

To this the man replied, quite unmoved, that

he would wait and see the man; he was greatly obliged to her, he was sure, for her offer, but it was necessary for him to see Hardman. Pretty bad weather, that, for the fall of the year, didn't she think?

"Yes," she said, gruffly, with a curt nod of her head, "bad weather, enough, but there were other things worse'n the weather to bother one."

What was it that bothered *her*, the man queried, with no show of interest other than to gain her good will.

Oh, nothing particular, she said; nothing particular, of course. There was seldom anything of importance there to bother any one. But this man who was murdered was one of their friends (she placed considerable stress upon the word) and it wasn't specially pleasant to have such things happen to one's friends and at one's very door. Then old Hardman wasn't as strong as he might be; some folks said he wasn't quite right in his mind, but that she scouted. *She* knew him better than that. Only it wasn't comfortable to be fretted about this dead man, and have folks

running to and fro to make sure of the scene of the murder.

The man, sitting over the pale fire, warming his hands, his hat upon his knee, eying her from under his half-closed lids, replied that it wasn't well to be bothered; no, he knew it wasn't. Why didn't they complain of it, and have it stopped?

Oh, yes, said the woman, with a scornful shrug of her shoulders, as she went on with her work, clearing the wood-box behind the stove and refilling it with ragged lengths of stick. There was ways, she supposed, to do such things, but it made folks surly; and, then, these rumors about that her uncle wasn't what he was years ago, as though anybody would expect that he should be.

Of course, the man replied, nodding his head thoughtfully. Who could expect that? Years and hard work were not just the sort of things to keep a person young and strong. Let those try it for themselves that thought differently. They'd soon know the truth.

The woman nodded in concert with her

strange visitor, but deemed, perhaps, that she had said enough. In any event, she kept silence the remainder of the time, and it was a pretty long time, ere her uncle returned from the lower lots.

He was just as hard and grasping and mean-looking as when he stood with the crowd in the court-room and listened to the trial of the man accused of murdering one of his friends; when he listened, too, to the half-accusation made against his own character by witnesses. His small, shrewd eyes looked out at the world with scrimping knowledge, as small and hardly pressed down as were the measures he gave and the measures he received. He could expect little, granting so much less.

His eyes fell instantly upon the stranger sitting unmoved over his fire, and his shriveled face expressed as much surprise as his face was capable of expressing any emotion under any circumstances. From his strange guest his eyes went to the face of his niece as though he would understand how it was that any man dared stand —or sit—with such assurance in his house; and she, comprehending, his look, shrugged her

shoulders carelessly and explained that this was a strange man come to see him and would leave no word, but must see him. Then she went on with preparing dinner over the same scanty fire, as there was nothing in the world could move her from her composure.

But the farmer took this intrusion in quite a different light. His small eyes twinkled with anger from under their bushy brows, and his thin lips with their pale hue—there was too little blood in his body even to tinge his lips—he asked with considerable more roughness what this man had to say, and why he could not have said it to the woman instead of waiting there where he was neither invited nor wanted.

Evidently used to such a manner of address, the stranger stated his errand and that he was sent over to old Hardman from a friend in Nyack; and with that he drew forth a letter from his inner pocket and handed it to his questioner. The old man's eyesight was pretty good for such an old shriveled man, and without waiting for his spectacles he opened the note and read what it contained with an air of suspicion

that must have made itself felt—for he had too few people for neighbors and fewer acquaintances whom he claimed as friends to place much credence on this part of the statement. But what he read was apparently satisfactory in spite of his former suspicion, for when he read it twice to make sure nothing escaped him, he turned to the man and demanded rather sharply what sort of farm-work he had done and could do, and if he could manage cattle and milk and do all the endless things requisite upon a farm.

"Fer my farm ain't special easy to keep in order," he explained, with a grin of intense satisfaction upon his face, "fer the reason of its bein' of considerable size, neighbor. Ye'll have to work up pretty hard an' make your mind easy with our plain eatin,' an' keep al'ays a quiet tongue, fer quiet tongues is better, an' does more the world over than all the clatter o' half a hundred noisy ones. An' we're quiet folk here, anyways," he added, with that strange, wrinkled parting of his lips that could never be graced with the appellation of a smile.

To all of which the stranger gave plain and satisfactory answers; and when the farmer had done questioning him, he was informed that he might remain until the next afternoon, when he —Hardman—was going over to Nyack, and could inquire if all was right regarding the note. If all was well he would be given a place upon the farm and retained there so long as his services were needed, or he proved himself worthy.

After the plain dinner of meat and vegetables —and little enough of them—the new man—John King, he gave his name—was sent out with the two other men to begin his duties, and so to work out his board, should it be proved on the morrow that he was not what he claimed to be. But when the morrow came and the old man went to town, he discovered that the new man had not deceived him.

Finding nothing wrong in all this, Josiah Hardman finished such other business as he had in the town, and returned home, reaching there after dark, as the days were short and the

storms across the early winter making the nights dark with cloud and lowering winds and chilling rains over the wild world.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CHINK IN THE WINDOW.

John King made no special remark when informed by his master that he would continue in his present position, the reference obtained having no flaw in it. He was called into the kitchen where Hardman and his niece were sitting more *over* than before the fire, after the short supper; and this news, imparted in as few words as were necessary to impress upon the hearer the concession granted him by their ever accepting him upon any terms of any one's recommendation, the old farmer, with his long, bony fingers clasped around a tumbler of cider upon the bare pine table beside him as he talked, his wary eyes showing that he feared

even that scant luxury might be taken from him did he not retain hold of it.

Certainly not a pleasant or reassuring sight this, but the man summoned into their presence might have been blind for all notice he took of it. He heard his master's message with a stolid face, and when he had done, nodded carelessly, as though it were of little moment to *him* whether he remained or not, though there was a gleam of satisfaction in the keen eyes turned upon the scant face before him that belied his manner. Then he went from the room, as he was bidden to do, and back to the room over the stables, where the hired men were expected to make themselves as comfortable or uncomfortable as circumstances would permit.

"He's disposed of," said the woman, sententiously, when John King was gone, her sharp eyes upon the old man's face. She rather resented this habit of his to indulge himself in the luxury of even a glass of cider over the fire of an evening, for she was a saving woman, was old Hardman's niece. "Mighty glad to get it,

too, I think, Can't al'ays get a place like this."

The old man nodded several times, as though in this way he conveyed a good deal of intelligence to the watching woman. Words were often such useless things. He raised the glass to his shrunken lips, his hand trembling somewhat. The woman's eyes were sharp to note this weakness. A gleam appeared in them. The old man *was* very old, and when he died this place would be hers by rights; she worked hard enough for it; she sold her soul even to retain her hold upon it; and when this trembling, mumbling old man died it should be hers. His dead daughter left no children, and the husband could claim nothing unless there should be a will; and she made sure of there being no will not long after she entered the household and bent her energies to holding and increasing what was already hoarded by her uncle in his grasping life.

"An' you made sure from Julian thet he was all right, did you?" she asked, by and by, after a long silence, during which the old man drank

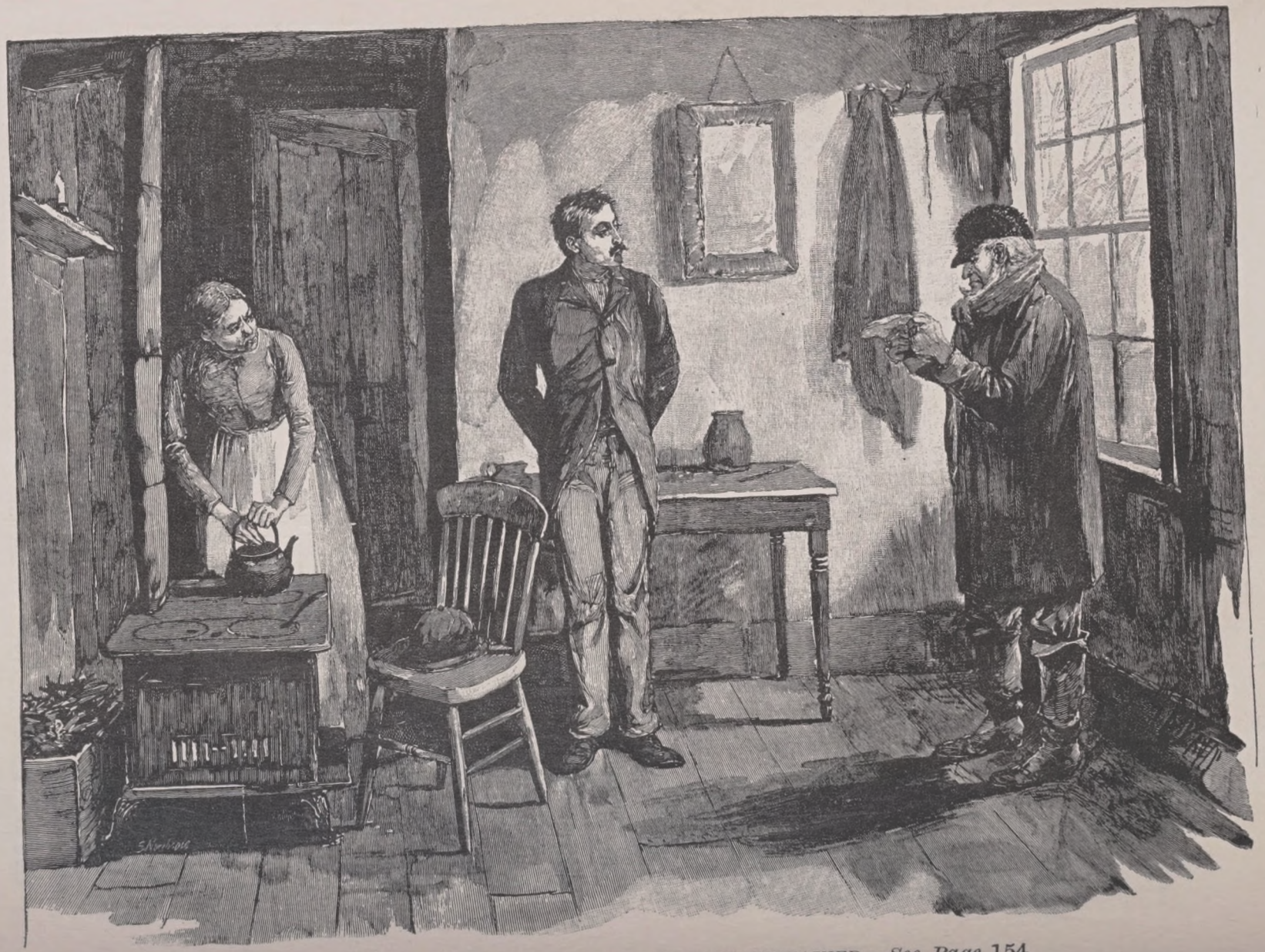
his cider with childish delight, and his niece could have found it in her heart to knock the glass from his hold and dash it into fragments if so she might break up this habit of his that must end in some harm to them; for when a man is under the influence of liquor, be it only cider and strong enough, he will say and do many things, she believed, that at another time torture could not wring from him.

The old man nodded again and muttered "Yes" in a low voice, with a shrinking glance behind him. Then he sat with his fingers around the glass, watching greedily the last few drops it contained.

"It's the best way!" retorted the woman, with a short laugh, shrugging her shoulders· "Make sure of 'em, you know!"

The old man lifted his eyes to her face and then let them drop again quickly as though he dared not or was powerless to meet her eyes. The yellowish pallor habitual to his face deepened for the moment to a ghastly hue. Then he, too, laughed in a harsh, broken, stealthy manner.

"Yes, it's al'ays best, Jane—it's al'ays best to



HE OPENED THE NOTE AND READ WHAT IT CONTAINED.—*See Page* 154.

make sure!" he said, shaking with his uncanny mirth. "We ain't got much here—we ain't got much; but what we has we want to keep."

"He wanted to see you when he comed first," said the woman, when all signs of this mirth died away. They had a habit of continuing conversation in this abrupt way. Hours might elapse between such short bits of talk, but they understood each other. That was one of their ties. "He said 't he would see you. I said he couldn't, an' he didn't." Grim satisfaction in this piece of shrewdness. "There ain't never no tellin' what folks want, comin' on one so."

The wood in the stove burned down lower and lower, until only a dead bed of ashes was left to warm the two sitting before it. The candle—for candles are cheaper and safer than oil—sputtered and sizzled and flared wanly, making the bare room more desolate and dreary than daylight showed it to be, and it was dreary enough then. Outside, the wind whistled shrilly through the twisted tree-boughs close to the house, even tapping now and then against the boards, as though some hand were knocking

warningly to those two sitting over the dying fire.

"An' there's things as happens," said the woman, leaning forward, her sharp eyes never moving from the shriveled face opposite her, one rough hand held out, one long finger emphasizing every word, as though, perhaps, the old man's memory were poor—"there's things as happens unbeknown sometimes in these lonely places, you know. It's al'ays best to be sure."

The old man shivered. The fire was almost out, and the wind was sharp for finding out cracks, he muttered, vaguely. His face wore once more that livid hue that was more ghastly than his usual pallor. He thrust out his two bony hands toward his companion, as though he would silence the words upon her lips. Since that murder in the woods so near his house, he was wild with terror upon such mad nights as this.

"It's so lonely, you know," repeated the woman, as though she took some horrible pleasure in torturing the man with what she

knew he feared. "An there's them as has no fear o' justice in their greed."

The old man made no answer, but he was a pitiable sight, as he shrank closer over the stove from which the fire was gone utterly out. He withdrew his hands from reaching out to the woman, and stretched them upon the very stove itself to gain some heat. It was deadly cold that night, he mumbled under his breath, as though he were intoxicated by the glass of cider. He scowled, and his bushy brows sank down startlingly over the small eyes. Horribly cold that night!

The woman seemed satisfied with her conversation, for she rose and stood up considerably above him in stature, as though to prove to him how weak he was beside her, and, with a harsh laugh upon her lips, took down a candle from the shelf behind the stove, and lighting it at the scrap of candle in the candlestick upon the table, turned away and left the room without further words. There were never any endearments between these two. It would have been out of human possibility.

When she was gone, the old man seemed to sink into a state of semi-unconsciousness, staring at the stove, his hands still upon it, cold though it was slowly growing under them. Then when midnight was over the world, and scarcely a spark was left in the candlestick beside him, he rose with a shiver, his thin form bent as though grown remarkably old during that one night, and making the dying candle last him, that he might save even that, he made certain the windows and door were secure, and groped his way from the room to the one just above, where he slept; the faint spark of his candle looking like an emblem of the life in his shriveled, stricken figure stumbling noiselessly along the narrow stairs.

But which one of those two would have dreamed—if ever they dreamed at all—that the blustering night of storm hid very near to them a stealthy form that lingered close—very close to the chink in one of the windows, where a ray of light struck upon the darkness, and through which a sharp eye could, if very intent, note what was passing within. Which of those two,

each striving to outdo the other in shrewdness, could have guessed that every word that was uttered that night, while the wind whistled so uncannily and the tree-boughs tapped warningly against the boards, was overheard by another than themselves, fastened in securely, as they believed themselves to be!

Would the old man have stolen so noiselessly up to bed with that spark of light tracing his way, with even his little peace of mind, had he known? Would the woman have laughed so easily when she turned from the only person to whom she was attached by the ties of blood in all the wide world?

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. WHITNEY'S CALLER.

Frank Whitney was in his office when Mr. Carleton was announced by his office boy. Very handsome he looked—Neil Carleton—as he walked into the elegant office with his tall, well-

knit figure, his fashionable dress, his close-cut black hair, and easy smile that never—the one striking thing about him—that never, at any time, extended to the lazy black eyes. He entered the room with the grace and ease of a prince, but every one of Frank Whitney's friends or acquaintances was certain beforehand that he would receive warm welcome.

The handsome lawyer reading a letter with a good deal of interest, judging from the frown upon his face, folded it, and, still holding it, but in a manner that made it impossible for any other to even guess at the handwriting, turned with his pleasant smile toward the new-comer.

"How are you, Carleton? Glad to see you. Be seated—I'll give you the easiest chair in the room here! I know you, you see!"

"It is always best to take life easy, Whitney," replied Mr. Carleton, smiling, as he took the stuffed chair his friend pushed toward him. "You'd be better yourself and live longer if you did not grind, grind, grind from morning to night. There's no excuse for this grinding of

the old mill of the world's gods. I came in on purpose to warn you, Frank!"

Whitney laughed, but his eyes glanced sharply, nevertheless, at the unconcerned face opposite him.

"You're one of the easiest going fellows, Carleton," he replied, calmly, twirling the letter he held in his left hand carefully round and round. "I'm not. Because I happen to have money is no reason for my wasting the one talent given me, if it is a talent, to help out of the sloughs of the law such poor fellows as slip in. It's a pleasant thing to feel that a body has possibly saved a life. The law's a great thing—powerful. You commit a murder, or hatch up one, and I'll hang you, Carleton."

He laughed, and those sharp eyes that could be so pleasant with smiling when he chose, were upon the lazy black eyes of his companion. Carleton laughed, too, but he moved uneasily in the chair, and tapped his fingers restlessly upon the arm.

"You are a deuced queer fellow, Whitney," he said, shrugging his shoulders and raising his

eyebrows a trifle. "It may be all very nice for you to hang me, but I really don't care to *be* hung, thank you. It must be slightly uncomfortable, and I go in for comfort in this world."

"And the next?" queried the lawyer, with sudden sharpness, flipping the edge of his desk with the letter. "I presume you never think of the next world, Carleton. Such fellows as yourself seldom think of unpleasant things."

Carleton frowned slightly, but answered, with his usual ease:

"There may be no next, Whitney. Some of the strong philosophers say so. But if there is—" He shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly, as though he must of necessity let the scarcely probable next world take care of itself; it was enough to take care of one's self in this one.

"But, by the bye, Whitney," he added, after a moment, removing a speck from the sleeve of his coat, with great care, "talking of courts reminds me that I came in particularly to inquire about Hilton. Of course, one cannot go to the house. As you're next best, you know—

that's one good thing about being a lawyer; you can fathom the family secrets where you will—I have come to ask you how the poor fellow gets on, and how his wife takes this change in their fortunes. Remarkably handsome woman Helen Hilton is. It's a shame that she should be placed in this uncomfortable position through her husband's carelessness—"

"Her husband's thoughtfulness, you mean, I presume," interrupted the lawyer, quietly, a gleam in the steady eyes set upon the handsome face at his right. "If Hilton had been any other man, he would not have attempted following Chesney and taking back his hard words. That wasn't Hilton. Not he. He felt himself in the wrong and attempted to right it. He swears this. I believe it. All his friends believe it, and the court acquitted him, not feeling justified in convicting such a man upon the evidence."

"And so," said Carleton, leaning back lazily in his chair, his black eyes half-closed, regarding his companion as though he would fathom his calmness. "And so, through this absurd sense of honor—"

"Through this high sense of honor," corrected the lawyer, quietly, his eyes meeting those gleaming half-closed eyes. "What then, Carleton?"

"Well, high sense, or low sense," continued Carleton, with a careless shrug of his shoulders, "through this action, be it what it may, he laid this disgrace upon his wife—as beautiful a woman as is in the city—and upon her family as well! If that is what you call the Good-Samaritan act, I don't approve of it. He should have known that exposure of their quarrel would place shame and publicity upon his wife through the relation existing between Helen and Chesney. It wasn't as *I* would have done, if I possessed such a wife as his."

"No," said the lawyer, very quietly, his eyes growing more keen than before. "I think it was not, Carleton."

Silence for a short time following this. Then Carleton, straightening up in his chair preparatory to rising and leaving, greater carelessness than before in his face and voice, said lightly:

"Any trace of the *true* murderer, Whitney?

Of course, they haven't given up search. The Chesneys alone would move heaven and earth to discover the right man; they offer a big reward in that direction; but Hilton's friends should do their best as well."

Frank Whitney very deliberately snapped the letter he held in his left hand with the slim fingers of his right, his eyes upon Carleton's face, not a sign of his inner thoughts betrayed, as he answered, with as much carelessness:

"I presume they will continue the search, Carleton; they'd not be the men I take them for if they desist here. If anything further is to be made known, it will *be* made known when the court chooses, and not before. That's what I have learned through my life behind the bar, and it is the best way. They will discover the real murderer, you need have no fear."

"It is really nothing to me, of course," was Carleton's careless reply, as he rose and turned from the busy desk of his friend. "But I should think it must go pretty black for Hilton, unless the true murderer turns up some time. That's all! Good morning, Whitney. I leave you to

your search for the philosopher's stone of wisdom in your musty law books. A free life is all I ask of the fates."

CHAPTER XIX.

MISS KITTY BELAIRE.

He went away curiously conscious that his visit fell rather flat, as to information received, even in relation to Hilton's condition, or the manner of Helen's endurance of the blow upon their proud old name. While the lawyer, turning back from the door when his visitor was gone, reseated himself before his desk and sat for a long time with his eyes bent upon it, the deep frown of thought marring the smoothness of his brow, the letter now open in his hand. He bit his lip, too, now and then, as though to keep back some annoying exclamation. What final decision he came to who could tell? Many strange things happened in that office of his as in other law offices, but by and by he touched

the call-bell upon his desk, and, when his boy appeared, sent word in for Miss Belaire to come to him for dictation.

Now Miss Kitty Belaire, Mr. Whitney's stenographer and typewriter, was the daintiest of business women as she entered with her tablet and pencil, a soft color in her cheeks, though the clear hazel eyes were steady and swift to catch thought. She and Frank Whitney were friends before the great change in her fortunes left her out of the circle of her fashionable life, and before she, refusing the dependence offered her by others, chose, with high-minded independence—absurdity, some called it—to herself bear the burdens placed upon her decidedly graceful shoulders. Frank Whitney, with his chivalry and earnest wish to further this true desire of the little woman, offered her this position when she was qualified to fill it, and in that position she was for a year up to the time of her entrance into his office the morning of Mr. Carleton's visit.

She never presumed upon their former social acquaintance; she even refused many little acts

of kindness from her employer because of that; but she held a high place in his opinion, and, fulfilling her duties promptly and well, what more could be desired?

She seated herself at his desk in the chair Mr. Carleton lounged so lazily in but a few moments before, and waited for her friend's pleasure.

She was a pretty sight in her neat black dress, with her neat black apron, embroidered round the edge by her mother's needle, her pretty hair arranged as neatly as her dress.

The lawyer, lifting his eyes from the desk and meeting this pleasant vision, searched her face keenly for a moment, and then, satisfied, smiled slowly.

"Miss Belaire, I wonder if there is any part of my business which you do not understand almost as well as I?" he said, pleasantly. "It would never do for me to stand in the prisoner's dock with you in the witness stand against me. The Hiltons are friends of yours as well as of mine. You are Mrs. Hilton's truest friend. You know what sort of woman she is."

"Yes," she said, quietly, a soft light in her

eyes. "Mrs. Hilton is one of the sweetest women I know, and one of the noblest."

He nodded, approvingly. The kindly expression was predominating now upon his face.

"You are acquainted with Mr. Carleton, Miss Belaire?"

"I know him very slightly," she replied, evasively, toying with the pencil in her hand.

"Do you like him—do you respect him—honor him, Miss Belaire? You will pardon my questions, I am sure, when you learn my reasons for asking," he added, quickly, noting the expression of her face. "I would not presume to ask, were there not good reason for so doing, believe me."

"I believe you," she said, quietly. Her life had taught her wonderful self-command. "I really know very little about Mr. Carleton, Mr. Whitney. He is no friend of mine. One can know little of those outside a friend's barrier."

"But you have formed an opinion of him, Miss Belaire," added the lawyer, calmly. "You

need not answer my questions; your face has already done that." He rested his elbow upon the desk and leaned forward toward her, his eyes upon hers. He honored and trusted this woman greatly. "Carleton's one of the easy fellows, you know. Doesn't want to be displaced by any one. He likes life to go pretty well with him. He has little faith in the power of the law, after all. He said just now that things must go blackly with Hilton if the true murderer does not show up. It is our determination to sift the matter to the very bottom. Hilton shall be cleared if it is possible;" again that subtle change upon his face as when he faced his friend's wife in the quiet room some weeks before.

"As you know, after those weeks of severe illness, Hilton is slowly recovering, but can never be himself until something definite is known. Before long his wife must return to her old home. That will be very bitter to her husband. I would prevent it if I could, but I think it may be well in the end. Hear me out with patience, please. That sounds harsh, but

it is not. I will tell you, Miss Belaire, that, although the jury acquitted Hilton, things do look black for him at present. You need not start. I tell you this plainly. You have heard as unvarnished truth before, and will listen quietly to this."

His eyes were meeting hers steadily, and she did not betray the slightest excitement.

"In this busy life, as you know, I am often called away upon business, sometimes unexpectedly and suddenly, making it impossible to make my plans here or leave any order for the day, possibly for many days." He straightened up and leaned back in his chair, as though this were the merest bit of trivial office order, and taking the letter from the desk where he laid it upon her entrance—the first time it left his hand since he first took it up—he continued:

"I have often thought it advisable to speak to you upon this matter, Miss Belaire, and this is as good an opportunity as any. In a moment I shall dictate an answer to this letter, and I would like you to take it down separate from the general dictation, giving to me the original and

the copy when you have finished with them. Also, I wish this letter directed to the person whom I will presently name, not by machine, but in your largest ordinary hand. The letter itself will be type-written.

"You have proved that I can trust you," he added, smiling, "You are as silent in regard to what you know of this office as though you were of stone. I wouldn't trust many women so far!"

The color was warm in her face, but she was perfectly self-possessed as she said, quietly:

"Your opinion of women should be better, Mr. Whitney, knowing Mrs. Hilton so well. I wish you possessed more faith in our sex!"

The smile deepened upon his lips and even flashed from his eyes, as he regarded her, his quick ear catching the note of wistfulness in her soft voice. Kittie Belaire had a delightful voice. Even her employer delighted to hear it.

"I trust you," he said kindly. "I trust you entirely, Miss Belaire, as presently I shall show. And I trust Mrs. Hilton. Some day I may have cause to trust more than two women; but my life behind the scenes gives me sometimes a

harsher view of life than all. Nevertheless, this is not coming to the subject for which I summoned you. I will show by what I say now that I do trust you utterly."

Once more he bent toward her, his eyes upon her face. She knew that he had something important to tell her, and there could have been no more perfect a listener than she.

"If, at any time, Miss Belaire, while I am absent, there should come for me any message—telegram or order—I give you full authority to open the same, and if there is need of immediate action concerning it, you will see either that it is done, or if it is something, perhaps, that would be best kept to ourselves, you will yourself do whatever is necessary. The fulfillment of important business may some day rest in this way upon your shoulders, but I know that I can trust you. If this business happens to be such that either you or others could not enter into it without my presence, I will always leave with or send you my address wherever I may go, that you may at once send on for me. Just at this time care in this matter will prove of vast import-

ance. I know that you comprehend what I mean and will faithfully carry out my wishes.

"Now, Miss Belaire, if you are ready for dictation, I will give you the reply to this letter, and wish it ready for the mail within fifteen minutes, as I then have to go out, and will mail it myself. When one does one's own business, one is so certain that it is accomplished."

He smiled upon his attentive listener, and, unfolding the letter before him, glanced hastily over it to make certain nothing was gone from his memory, and began his dictation.

He did this carefully, word for word, and when it was copied, and the letter with the copy brought to him, it was addressed in a clear but rather masculine hand to:

JOHN KING, ESQ.,
Nanuet, N. Y.

CHAPTER XX.

OLD HARDMAN'S BOY.

December storms and gales gave place, as the weeks went by, to late January, and the world was white with snow and very, very cold. As hard a winter, people said, as the autumn had been dark.

Old Hardman shivered over his low fire evenings, with his cider at his hand, and his niece taunted him now and then, when the mood was upon her, with his fear and his weakness. He was failing somewhat, this hard old man, with no trace of life's snow upon him, no hint of life's beauty or softness, of the days when the Now stands upon the brink of the Hereafter. He still clutched as eagerly the gain that came to him, and chuckled over his shrewdness and the sharpness of the woman in his house; and

shivered and shriveled and trembled more and more, as the weeks slipped away.

The new man got along as well as could be expected with his hard master and his greedy mistress. His fellow-workers, at first suspicious of him, kept aloof from him until, by his good humor and apparent unconsciousness of any ill feeling toward himself, he brought them to a better state of mind, although still they did not make as free with him, or when he was with them, as among themselves. Of this, however, the man made no complaint, and whistled as cheerily about his work or trudged on as steadily as any man of stolid, easy habits of thought should do. If his comrades would not make friends with him, he could dispense with them. He did his work as though he were the best liked of the four; for old Hardman's boy was counted as one of them.

The boy was slender, sixteen or thereabouts, his hard life leaving no room for certainty as to that; and there was that in his manner and face that proved he was cowed by brutality and rendered fearful by blows. There was nothing

ill-favored about him, save his wan face and habitual look of fear. His eyes were bright, though they kept furtive watch continually, lest some chance mistake should bring upon him as prompt punishment. His smile would have been good to see, were it not that when it crossed his lips—it was seldom, in truth—it was more sad than merry, and only made his thin face such as would cause a good woman's heart to ache.

His companions gave little heed to him, at best. They grumbled at him when things went wrong, because he was young and helpless and would take their abuse meekly. But when he did not force his presence upon them in such moods, they got on with him well enough. This until the new man came upon the farm.

Tom Day, the boy's name was, and he and John King, the new man, "yoked together," the other men said, pretty fair for a grown man and a little chap. Why this was, who could tell? The new man practiced no arts upon the boy; he took almost as little notice of him as the others; but if chance or their work brought

them together, perhaps he spoke more kindly to him, or helped him when it was possible and his work was harder than usual. Some men were foolish enough to do such things, and this man might be one of them. So long as he did not interfere with them what had they to say?

This man came upon the boy, one day, struggling with the work of cutting up a heavy load of rough wood drawn in from the woods and left until winter brought lighter work and an opportunity to set one of the men at work upon it. It was particularly hard work, and too severe for such young arms, weakened as they were from scant living and abuse, and the boy was doing his best, with a downcast face, when this man came upon him. He was a rough man and used to rough life, but his eyes flashed as he came up, and a frown was upon his face, that disappeared ere he addressed the other.

"Always hard at work, Tom," he said, cheerily, shrugging his shoulders with great significance. "Eh, but it's a hard life at best, lad, and those as works us poorer ones will some

time, maybe, learn it. Give us a hand there with that. It's too heavy for you to manage alone."

"Oh, no!" The boy looked up, frightened, and wiped with one ragged sleeve the perspiration from his flushed and heated face. It was in mid-winter and the snow lay thick upon the ground, but his work kept out the cold, indeed, as his master had told him with immense satisfaction, chuckling, when he set him upon it. "It'd never do—never, Mr. King. He," with a suggestive nod backward toward the house, "set me to it, an' he'd never let no one help me; 'tain't his way. You know master. He's may be kind enough, but he won't let nobody help you when once he's said fer you to do some'at. It is good of you, Mr. King; but I wouldn't dare."

The big man laughed roughly, and his eyes twinkled with some inner appreciation of the situation, for he walked up and took the saw from the boy's hand with extreme authority.

"Now when I say that I'll do a thing, it most generally happens that I *do* it, lad," he said, grimly; "and it's best for those whom I say it to,

to let me alone *for* doing it! If old Hardman has any fault to find about my sawing this wood, let him come along and tell me, and I think I can settle with him tolerably sudden. Such work as this isn't for such arms as yours, and as long as Jack King's about these parts you're not going *to* do it, either! Do you suppose I'm afraid of old Hardman—or that woman? Humph!" His big broad shoulders seemed to shrug of themselves like the powerful shoulders of some massive dog. "If you have any such notion, you may as well get rid of it now. Let him say his say when he's of a mind, and then I'll say *mine!* I'd as lief have it done now as any time. And mind this, lad;" he rested for a moment upon the huge saw and placed one heavy boot upon the log of wood before him, his keen eyes upon the shrinking boy, who always attained to some degree of dignity when in his presence, there was something so big and quiet and powerful about him. "If ever you're afraid of the consequences of such an encounter between old Hardman and Jack King, I'll invite you along to see the proceeding, wherever it takes place!

Jack King's seen maybe more such men—or makeshifts for men—than ever *you've* seen in your whole living days! And—there—ain't *one* —such—as he is afraid of!"

With this strong assertion the big man took down his big boot with special deliberation, hauled up the saw in his muscular arms, and setting it upon the exact spot upon which to begin operations, set to with a will that left nothing for the boy to do but look on and admire.

Winter moved along with snow and rough winds and hard weather. Cold, very, very cold, the old man often muttered, crouching over the fire, his hands reached out for warmth that was wanting, his eyes narrowing and contracting whenever a louder gust of wind than usual swept around the house and shrieked at the corners or shrilled in a ghostly fashion at the windows, rattling them, shaking them like angry hands mad to enter, mad to tear the crouching, shivering, shriveled man into atoms in its wrath.

Perhaps the wind knew more than any one of the silent figure so often hidden in the night's

darkness close to that window nearest the two over their faint fire—near the window where the chink in the shade left the room for an intent eye to watch what went on.

A hard, cold winter, the old man muttered often and often, crouching so with the hard woman, apparently unmindful of heat or cold, beside him.

Their conversations were as brief and keen for their own knowing, as ever. The woman, in her hard, harsh strength, taunted the old, weak, grasping man, who would sell his soul for added copper or scrip, and whose one agony seemed that some night, when the winter winds were wild and the world was locked in ice, out of the night some ghastly form would creep, and creep nearer and nearer and nearer through those dense woods toward the village where the murdered man lay upon the snow under the crisp November sky, now covered with the down of the northern world, and so coming out from darkness into the darkness of the old house, should find him crouching over the dying fire

alone, and, with its powerful arm uplifted, strike *him*, as that other man was struck by a bullet swift as thought.

CHAPTER XXI.

A TERRIFIED WHISPER.

So the winter went on, and it was nearly spring again, and the cold did not so intensely creep into the bare kitchen to chill the old man. Every day was as the day before and as the day to come, so far as unobservant eyes could see. Hard life for men; hard life for master and mistress; hard life for the boy slowly waking to some sort of life under his new friend's care. Perhaps the silent figure never tiring in its silent watch at the window when night set darkness upon the world, heard and saw things others could not know; but if so, all things went on smoothly and silently and uneventfully as ever.

Tom, the boy, was in disgrace with his master,

and, like all under him, was continually under distrust and dislike. He had not done such work as was given him to do during the day, and many blows fell to his lot and much abuse besides. His friend was not by at the time, and the unprotected boy bore with his usual silence the treatment that lightened lately for him. But when the day was over and work was done with until morning, the big man came upon Tom hidden among the the hay in the loft, where he was gone for the night's feed for the cattle—sobbing with a boy's grief and with more than ordinary bitterness over the day's harshness. The big man, rough though he was, was gentle with this lad at such times. Now he made no exclamation that might by chance be overheard and so betray their confidence; but he knelt down at the poor fellow's side and laid his heavy hand with remarkable lightness upon his shoulder.

"Eh, Tom, lad," he said, softly, his eyes burning with some inner thought—"eh, Tom, it's a bitter world a man lives in. But what's amiss

now? You can tell it to me. Something to do with that old brute?"

The boy cowered more and more in the fragrant, dry hay, over which the cattle would soon stand, with their heavy breathing and their stolid eyes, as though life to them were a mystery, too. Then he lifted his convulsed face to this strange friend beside him in the darkness of the barn, and put timidly out one rough hand, as though even this rough man's sympathy were the gentleness of angels to him in his solitary life of hardship.

"Hush!" he whispered, so hoarsely the man bent to catch the words. "Hush, Mr. King! 'Ssh! 'Tain't safe to *breathe* hereabouts. Maybe you don't know that if master caught you or any one a-saying such things, he'd—he'd—"

The horrified voice died off in silence, as though its very terror stifled sound. The man laughed, but in the same hushed manner as that in which the boy spoke. He might be brave, but he was no fool. Then he bent lower over the crouching figure beside him in the hay, and

feeling certain that they were alone and beyond observation, took up his lantern, which he had placed carefully in a safe corner, and turning on the bull's eye, flashed it upon the face of his companion.

A pallid, terrified, rather ghastly face this that met his sight. The slim figure, shivering as though with the cold of which the old man over his fire muttered. The rough hands were clasped tightly together and pressed down upon his breast, as though so either to still forever its throbbing or hush the daring words upon his lips. A face, once seen, always to remain upon one's memory. But the man, seeing it, only allowed a grim smile to stir his lips, his eyes flashing like gleams of fire through the strange darkness around them. Then he closed with a click the shining eye of this silent friend of his, and setting it carefully back in its safe corner, laid his hand upon the trembling boy's head.

"Now, Tom," he said, very distinctly, though still in a whisper, and scarcely moving his lips, the sound seeming to come in some strange

"YOU'VE COME AT LAST, HAVE YOU?"—*See Page* 198.

fashion through his set teeth, though still the distinct voice was not touched by any excitement—"now, Tom, lad, you give over this trembling because I happened to speak of the old man in those terms. Maybe I ain't special in love with him myself, and maybe I am. There is something on your mind, Tom, lad, that maybe I don't guess and maybe I do. Tell it me—it's the only way—and I'll help you out as best I can. I'm only a rough chap at best, but I mean well. Don't you go to being afraid of *me*, Tom, lad! We're comrades, you and me, Tom. Tell it me—do!"

And then, as though some good angel were bending above the homeless, lonely, ill-used boy, he started up in the strange darkness and silence of the barn and grasped his companion's hands as though so he would keep fast hold of his new courage, and with a vehemence startling in one so cowed, his wan face quivering—could his friend but know—half terror, half daring in his wild eyes, he cried beneath his breath:

"You're the only one as has ever been good to me sence—sence—*he* died, Mr. John, an' I'll

tell you; but—" Again that quivering and paling and terror and a horrified glance backward into the darkness of the barn—once more if only the man could have seen!—"Lord—Mr. John!—*if they had heard me breath it or dreamed* that I knowed—*they'd kill me, too!* They'd *kill* me, they would!"

CHAPTER XXII.

WHO WAS HE?

A man sat in the waiting-room of the depot at Nyack one Sunday evening. It was rather lonely at night in that portion of the town, and few people on the street. The safest time of the twenty-four hours, if one wished to pass unobserved.

The man was a stranger, too. He came up from the city on the 8:45 train; he must wait until the 9:15 train to return to the city that night. But as he sat alone, waiting the arrival of some one whom he expected momently, his

thoughts were so swift that time went by almost unnoticed. Already he had waited some half-hour or so, but with apparent indifference on his part. He wore a heavy spring overcoat, for the night was in April, and the collar was turned up around his throat, perhaps partly to keep off the chill of the night, partly to hide the lower part of his face, the only feature of which was visible being a glimpse caught now and then as he moved uneasily, of a carefully kept black beard and mustache. His hat, pulled low over his eyes hid them effectually, and that part of his face left unhidden by the coat collar. He was tall and slow of movement when he presently rose and walked to the door, peering up and down the platform; a man used to an easy sort of life, one would think, watching him.

"Deuce take those fellows!" he muttered, impatiently, as he stood looking into the night. "If they break their agreement, or if *he*"—a dark frown upon the heavy black brows, as for one instant he lifted the slouching hat, as though to ease the excitement—"if *he* should have bought them over, or worked upon their cowardice

or credulity— But what's the use of fretting? They'll come, doubtless, in good time. Give a man his time and he'll do almost anything."

He broke off here, too, for this train of thought would end in the old adage of the man certain to hang himself if given his own time and length enough of rope. It was anything but a pleasant thought, and he was not fond of unpleasant thoughts or unpleasant occurrences. So he shrugged his shoulders, and nestling his throat well down in the wide collar of his coat, and thrusting his hands in his pockets, walked slowly up and down the room, endeavoring to keep up an enlivening whistle to chase away the blues.

"She little thought I was behind her carriage when she drove up here that day," muttered this tall man, his black eyes gleaming exultantly. "Perhaps she would not have felt so secure had she known of it. She always distrusted me, I believe. Even with no cause. If she could know what cause she has at present, she might be a trifle more unhappy than she is. It's a deuce of a thing, though, knowing that if those

fellows peach on me—that's vulgar, but it's what they call it—things 'll turn out against me instead of her; but so long as there is a chance to hurt her I will never go back; I fear it is too late *to* go back!

"And these men," added the man, the whistle fading faintly off and presently dying utterly out, "are such rough fellows, they'd never think twice of turning against one if there were more money to be made on the other side. They have as little conscience as I, and that is little enough." He laughed softly and low, as though even laughter were not safe in that place at that hour. "They would as lief swear a man's life away for a small roll of bills as they would eat a dinner, and I fancy they are never over-fed. I would give considerable if they would make their appearance, however— But the heavens be praised, they are coming."

Two men, these newcomers. Both were slouching in gait and dressed roughly. They were evidently used to rough life and rough living, as the man said. They slouched up to this other man, who stood apart from them

insensibly by his very attitude of *hauteur*, himself unconscious of this, though down in his soul he may have been but their equal.

"Well!" this man said, angrily, as he paused, confronting them, his black eyes blazing upon them beneath his low-set hat. "You've come at last, have you? Perhaps you imagine that I have nothing to do but wait in this devilish hole for you! It has put me out enough coming this distance to please you, anyway. What do you want with me? Come, out with it, will you!"

He was either very angry or very well versed in assuming, though his voice was low and his words indistinct to one beyond the room, unless one were listening steadily. The men remained stolid. What had they to do with excitement or high words when their lives were so monotonous and endless?

"Couldn't help it, boss," one of them then said, sullenly. His eyes went stealthily from the man's face, with their keen suspicion, to the well polished boots, and from there to sweep the room and linger longest in the dark corners or out at the windows, as though there might be

that in the night beyond that would stir even his sluggish blood. Then he shifted from one foot to the other restlessly, wishing his errand were well over and he beyond those brilliant black eyes and the mystery around the tall stranger.

"Couldn't help it, indeed!" retorted the man, scornfully, striding from the room, apparently regardless whether or no the men followed him. But he knew very well that they dared do nothing else so long as they were under his rule. And when at last he halted in the darkness of the road under the edge of the buildings farther on, they were beside him in their usual dogged manner, and the man muttered under his breath, still wrathfully; for the night and darkness and loneliness of the place were enough to change the disposition of an angel, he added, with a swift, backward glance from his flashing eyes under the rim of his soft hat.

"Well!"

He turned upon them again—he was always startling them with his moods and swiftness of movement. The darkness was so dense that one could no more than see one's hand held out.

Only the light of stars and the distant street-lamps cast a faint glimmer on the darkened streets. It was strange what an unbroken shadow seemed to lie beneath those buildings.

"Well," repeated the tall stranger, a low tone of threatening in his hushed voice, as he faced these two rough men in the shadows. "You sent me word that you have something to say to me. I sent to *you* to meet me here to-night. Here we are. Now, what have you to say? Remember what I told you in the first place—I will not be fooled with—I will not be so annoyed by any man or woman living! If you have anything to say, say it. I am anxious to get away from this deadly hole. No wonder you are such slow men, living in such places as you do! You will change when once you are away from such surroundings. And you know that when you have done my work satisfactorily, you will have money enough to leave that farm and go where the ocean will divide this life from the one you may choose. Only—" the men shrank into themselves at the fierceness of the smothered voice—"if you dare to fool me, you shall have

prison bars around you instead of a free life. Now you know what to expect, and I am waiting to hear what you have to say."

"We ain't got much to say," ventured the readier of the men slowly. The stranger was growing restless, thinking such uncanny thoughts, with his rough companions, the sole moving or waking creatures so far as they knew anywhere in the neighborhood. His right hand was upon the railing before the store in whose shadow they stood, the fingers clenched upon it as though he would be prepared for anything that might befall him. His left hand—well, he had not the confidence in these men some men might have, and his left hand was resting lightly upon the revolver in his breast-pocket. The fire in the black eyes should have flashed out visibly to his companions standing so stolidly before him.

"Never mind how little it may be," he said, impatiently, and in his low, distinct voice, evenly modulated, though swift of utterance. "If it be but three words, let me hear them, my men, and then—good-night and pleasant dreams!"

He laughed shortly and harshly. He would admit of no trifling from these clowns, not he.

"We ain't got much to say, boss," this spokesman went on, when the reckless laughter was silent. "It may not seem much or anythin' to you, but we made up our minds 't you oughter know, in case there *should* be some'at in it, so we sent for you."

"Yes," said the man. "Well?"

"An' we comed here to-night," continued the man, while his companion muttered some inaudible acquiescence, "to say 't there come to ther farm last winter—ther early part o' ther winter—as we has a'ready told you—a man. He wanted work. He come recommended by the old man's lawyer, and stayed. The old man daresn't do naught thet his lawyer hadn't a mind fer him to do, an' when *he* said fer him to take this feller, he took him. He had to."

"Well?" resumed the stranger in that hushed excitement of voice, making no movement, but ready for whatever should come. "He took him. What then? I knew all this before."

"This feller," went on the slow speaker, as

though time were eternity and he was not to be hurried, "seemed all right at first. He done his work—he does his work now just ther same, but —*he* ain't ther same!"

He paused as though this startling piece of news must prove effective in moving the listener; but it did not.

"Well?" How persistently and steadily he repeated this monosyllabic query! Even the stolid men before him were ruffled by his perfect self-control. "And then?"

"Oh, an' then!" said the man, with a gruff laugh, as though this were in truth a strange gentleman to listen to such news. "An' then, as he ain't ther same man, he's either changed powerful, or some other, ain't he?"

No reply; no query this time from the listener.

"First thing as made us s'pect him," the man added, in a lower tone, as though even the building beside them might wish to listen, "was thet Jim here waked up one night an' found ther fellers gone from ther loft! He didn't say nothin', fer he ain't special give to watchin' folks, ain't

Jim—but he watched next night an' ther same thing went on—an' has gone on ever since, night after night."

"And you?" queried the steady voice, unmoved.

"An' then he telled me, did Jim, an' we made up our minds to watch him. We did. He's kept a-watchin' an' watchin' an' watchin' et ther old man's winders night after night. He never knowed *we* was watchin' *him!*"

This appeared a good joke, and the man laughed.

"You found?" the gentleman questioned.

"We found out suthin' thet maybe you'd like to know," replied the rough speaker, slowly. "We heered him an' ther boy talkin' in ther hay t'other night. What they said sounded as though some one oughter know. You was ther only one we could come to. You had our word 't we 'd give you whatever we found out!"

"Yes?"

"Well," very slowly and very softly—as softly as his rough voice could be modulated—the man spoke, "ther old man had been purty rough

on the boy that day. He'd cut him up raythe rough. But ther old man's rough, anyways, 'ceptin' with this 'ere other feller. *He* keeps him in with a mighty ticklish hand! He's got a way o' makin' you afeared o' him an' his big muscles."

"And you fear him, too, I presume!" said the man, scornfully.

"No, stranger," said the other, slowly still, and steadily, "we ain't afeared o' nothin' but—bein' found out!"

In the darkness, could human eyes have pierced it, the stranger's color changed to a deadly pallor. He did not attempt further questioning, but waited for their pleasure.

"Well, ther boy was a-cuttin' up's rough as ther old man had been, all by hisself in ther hay, an' this chap he comed up along of him—as though he knowed he'd find him there—an' he talked smooth to him, an' made a sight o' his troubles, an' purty soon he come to ther very thing I hain't a doubt he'd been aimin' at ther whole time." The speaker paused for breath,

but receiving no remark from his listener, he presently resumed:

"Wot had been a-goin' on in ther old man's kitchen all the time thet he'd watched, we couldn't, o' course, make out; but now he telled 'nough to ther boy for us to guess. An' when he'd a' most frightened ther life outen ther boy by his hints, he come out strong an' made him tell suthin' as was on his mind; suthin' as 'll make your hair stand on end when you hear it, boss. Me an' Jim—Jim don't go fer sayin' much, but he ken keep up a-thinkin'—was so scart by what ther boy said, thet we jest got outen ther barn soft as we could, an' crept back in ther loft, an' was sleepin'—oh, my, we was a-sleeping sound—when them two come back."

"What did this boy say?" asked the tall man, steadily.

The hand upon the railing tightened its hold; the hand upon the revolver was clenched for ready use.

"He said," the speaker learned a trifle nearer the other, and his breath was so close upon his face that the stranger stepped back to avoid him.

"He said 't *he seen it done*—'t he were on *ther very spot* hisself, but dassent let 'em know—'t they'd as lief as not *kill him, too*, ef they found out thet he seen *it all done*."

"Speak out!" muttered the stranger, falling back still farther from the man. "Man, speak out! Tell the rest—there is more to tell! And then—"

"We had to be very quiet, me an' Jim," said the man, glancing back instinctively over his shoulder, as though that strange, ghostly figure might creep through the deep shadows, even in those streets of the town, and strike him down with its powerful right arm. "It'd hev done no good to 've let 'em know 't we was there, an' there was no tellin' what this feller 'd hev done ef we had. So we scarcely darst to move or breathe, an' kept list'nin'. Ther boy was scart a'most outen his life, an' didn't speak more 'n jest above a whisper, an' if we hadn't a-knowed they was there, we could 'a' never found 'em.

"Ther boy went over, ez near ez we could catch o' what he said—word fer word, ther

whole thing, even thet he didn't dare breathe it to a livin' soul, to save ther prisoner, for fear they'd kill him, too! They hadn't been overmuch kind to him, an' he was a-feared o' them. Well, it all come out after awhile. He'd give this other feller evidence 'nough ter clear up ther whole thing, an' ther feller's one ter do it. Besides which, ther boy went on ter say how they old man 'd grinded an' grinded his father down till he died, an' so got away ther farm an' took him only 'cause he feared he'd peach ef he didn't keep him under his thumb! Oh, he's a precious fellow—that boy! But ther man, he kept him quiet-like, an' by an' by they got down outen the hay-loft, an' we was far 'nough off when they come out! But," here the rough voice grew slower still, and it sounded as though he were emphasizing each word with one hard hand, "there's this else to say to you, boss. This fellow ken bring outen ther whole thing straight an' true, unless he's stopped in time! An' why?" Again this strong, slow emphasis. "Because he's one o' them detective

fellers sent up from the city by—ther prisoner's lawyer."

The visitor turned to the men beside him with sudden, desperate determination.

"You are speaking the truth?" he asked, sternly. "You and your companions are willing to swear that what you tell me is true? That this boy and this man hold facts ready for the telling, that will prove our useless work, and leave us nothing to do but take ourselves off the scene as gracefully as is in our power? If you have fooled me, men—" he was in a towering rage, and the men shrank from him, feeling the desperation upon him at this unfortunate moment of his life, when perhaps for the first time his strongest effort failed—"if you have *dared* trifle with me—"

"It's ther truth, boss," said the man, who carried on the conversation up to that time. "It's the gospel truth. Me an' Jim can swear 't it's the truth."

"Then," the tall stranger conquered his passion by a powerful will, and, still grasping the railing, stood up erect before them, his figure

faintly descried in the thick shadow, save where a faint glimmer of distant lamps flickered across the darkness, "then there is but one thing to be done—we must get this fellow out of our way and keep him away until such time as we think best for him to return. I will dare anything—*anything* now, if you stand true to me. I have gone too far to go back, even though such weakness would tempt me to do so."

"Yes, I think you have—gone *quite* too far, my fine gentleman!" murmured the "new man," standing silently for a moment in the deepest shadow just at the right of the railing, listening to the retreating footsteps of the conspirators as they passed down the street in the direction of the station, the two spies leaving the tall man at one of the cross-streets, to re-enter the station and wait the coming of the down-train, alone.

"A mighty sight too far, my friend, and it appears to me that you will bear watching!"

And he, too, with marvelous patience, waited on the side-platform at the station for the train that should carry from the quiet town two passengers instead of but one.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT A DEATH-BED.

A telegram for Mr. Whitney! Miss Belaire glanced up from her machine as calmly as though she were in the habit of taking innumerable telegrams for him. Mr. Whitney was out of town, but she knew his address and could send for him immediately if it were necessary. She took the message from the boy and signed for it; then, as he walked away, she tore it open in her quiet, inexcitable way, and glanced over its contents. Had the eyes of the world been upon her, instead of merely the bright eyes of the office-boy, she would have been just as calm. Nevertheless, the message was a startling one.

"Come to this station at once. Utmost importance. Bring witnesses. He is dying."

And it was signed simply, "John King;" the station, Nyack.

But Miss Kittie Belaire was equal to most demands upon her strength of mind and heart. She called the boy to her and told him she would have to leave for the day; that she was called away upon business. If further messages should come for Mr. Whitney they were to be sent immediately to her home until either he or she returned. If the boy was considerably amazed by this state of affairs, it was not his business to say so, and she might have been speaking upon the most ordinary matter for all the interest he showed. Then Miss Kittie very quietly closed her machine and locked up the dictation-book, and, donning her hat and wraps and gloves, went away with her accustomed pleasant word of farewell to the clerks. She never forgot others, even at such a time as the present.

Her mind was pretty busy as she waited for the elevator in the hall, for the message demanded not a moment's delay. Whom should she go to for witnesses? She herself would go up to Nyack, of course, but she must have wit-

nesses. Then she remembered John King's associates, and hurried to the detective bureau as fast as possible. On the way she telegraphed to Frank Whitney what had occurred, and sent another message to her mother. Everything was very business-like under Miss Kittie's hands.

At what hours trains left for Nyack she did not know, but she went straight from the detective office to the Erie depot at Jersey City, in company with two well-dressed men who were ordered to attend her. She carried money enough with her for any ordinary demand, and need not delay further than absolute necessity called for. She was under intense excitement, but would not betray it. Perhaps she was paler than usual, but the men accompanying her did not know her usual color and could not judge. They wondered considerably over the demure little woman beside them.

The trip was not long, but it seemed so to the girl. She hoped that Mr. Whitney would receive the telegram, and hasten to join them. Of the latter she did not doubt if he received the telegram. She was well enough acquainted

with the duty and importance of John King to know that there was not a moment to be lost in complying with his demand. There was a boy upon the station platform, evidently on the look-out for them, and one of her companions—they were shrewd men and understood pretty well what was required of them—inquired of him how they could reach old Hardman's house at Nanuet.

The boy was pale and thin, but he was not stupid. He had been sent to this station to wait for *them;* from John King's description he recognized Miss Kittie. His pale face flushed with the strangeness of his position, and his voice was low and unsteady as he replied to the query, and asked if they were come in reply to Mr. King's message.

"Yes, it's all right," said the man carelessly, but not roughly. "Will you take us there in the quickest time ever you made, youngster?"

"I comed for you," the boy said, quickly. "*He* sent me."

After that none of them spoke a word. They hurried into the carriage in waiting, and ordered

the driver to spare no horse-flesh, to get them in time to the break in the woods upon the Nyack turnpike, whence they could reach old Hardman's house the better without observation.

"*He* told me to take you the way nobody'd see you much," explained the boy, in a frightened voice, as they left the carriage on the road, and followed their guide into the woods, regardless of underbrush or brier. "An' I'll tell him you've come, if you'll wait a minnet in the hall, when we get there."

"Go it!" ordered one of the men, peremptorily. "Make haste, youngster! It'll be best for *you* if you mind!"

John King did not come down to meet them. He knew much better than to leave the bedside of the old man, who was in truth—such is the uselessness after all of grasping the glass of Time when once the drops are low—upon his death-bed. He sent Tom down again, and there was no necessity for him to urge the boy to make haste; he was bound to him too utterly by ties of kindness and fear to make him loiter. They were taken to the bare room above the

kitchen where the old miser lay; the niece, finding to her surprise that it was useless for her to object to this hired man doing as he would, when—still by some strange tie of life or fate—the dying man would keep him beside him, nor let him from his sight for a moment. To send the message to the lawyer, he was obliged to trust to Tom, ordering him to take one of the farm horses and go at his best speed.

Very remarkable it was, this woman said to herself, as she saw the strange visitors to her uncle's death-chamber, that this hired man dared invite his friends at such a time. Her shrewd eyes recognized without trouble that they were none of the country people; no one she ever saw; no one she could care to see. And here her eyes grew narrow and contracted in their great shrewdness, and a strange smile stirred her thin lips.

She moved away from the bedside to make room for the new-comers, not daring to ask the why or the wherefore for this intrusion, for she was learning remarkable caution since the new man came upon the farm; John King's keen

eyes were upon her, and she moved but a few steps, and there waited.

Why she should so obey the mere glance of this man's eyes, she did not know; she did not even ask herself. She knew it was his wish that she remain where she was, and she remained. By and by she stole very softly from the room, unnoticed in the horrible scene enacted there; and even the hired man's sharp eyes could not hold her, not being upon her in the deadly trial of mind and justice.

She was very shrewd—oh, truly, she was wonderfully shrewd—was this woman!

The room was dark and close when they entered; but upon their arrival, as though he dared not stir from the bedside, lest he should lose some wish (?) or some need of the dying man, John King crossed the bare, creaking boards, and opened the one tiny window to admit the air. It was a chilly day, and the wind searched the chamber through, as though to purify it, if possible, for the Great Guest soon to enter.

A bare, desolate, hard room in which a man

must die. A rough, scant, scrimped room in which to meet such a guest. But the sunlight would creep in through the small panes, and, strangely enough crept up and up and up to the foot of the bed, to the side, up even to the hands —ghastly hands, and convulsively clasped to the face of the dying man.

Miss Kittie Belaire was a self-controlled woman, but she shivered and shrank away when her bright eyes fell first upon this livid face. John King saw this, and shook his head at her warningly. He was still, in appearance, but the rough hired man of the farm, but his manners had changed since their arrival.

"It's all right, miss," he said, quietly, standing very near the bed. "It's the way we've all got to go. But it'd, perhaps, be as well for us all to pray that death may not come to *us* as it's coming to him, nor"—a keen expression over his entire face—"the same conscience haunt us when we lie dying."

"Mr. Whitney's coming," said one of the other men, in a low tone.

He glanced through the window, and recog-

nized the lawyer, as he hurried from a saddle-horse at the gate—a horse trembling and covered with foam from the haste of his ride. There was some delay in obtaining an entrance, and the hired man was about to go down himself or send Tom, when the door opened and admitted the new-comer. He was flushed with haste, but when he saw the group around the bed, he regained his perfect self-control, and joined them as quietly as though it were but an every-day affair, this slow approach of a terrible guest, the tall figure stealing across the snow of the woods, and lifting its powerful arm to strike down the shivering, shriveled old man, with his distorted face upon the hard pillow.

"You have done well," he said to Miss Belaire, as he joined them. His eyes told her the rest. He trusted her fully—there was no doubt of that. "I came on at once. Am I in time?"

King nodded. The other men made place for him respectfully, for the young lawyer was an authority not to deny. Then their attention was concentrated upon the dying man.

"He muttered some things I thought it well

for others to hear besides myself," said the hired man. "I rather think you will be pleased to hear what he has to say, Mr. Whitney. I shall question him a little more now that you have come. Be good enough to keep your attention upon his words. Had he died two weeks ago I would have little real fact to go upon. I have all that is needed—more than is necessary now. You are to remain to make strong any little last word he may wish to say."

Mr. Whitney nodded. It was advisable not to prolong unnecessary conversation with the dread Angel of Death hovering at the doorway ready to enter when the one poor last drop of life's red blood should fall from the mighty glass those convulsive fingers clutched with such fierceness. Then John King bent over the struggling face upon the pillow, and said, very distinctly and slowly, his eyes upon those sunken, wavering eyes that had been very shrewd to cheat his fellowmen, but were of no use in cheating the Guest waiting at the door:

"A horrible place—in that wood where the murder was committed, isn't it, Hardman?"

The effect of his words was startling even beyond his own expectation. The shriveled face started from the pillow, and those wild, fading eyes stared from their sockets in terror.

"A horrible place—ay, ay, a horrible place! An' ther figger—there—see it?—a-comin', al'ays a-comin' ter strike me down as I—as I'd 'a' shot him on'y fer his face an' his voice! An' when I couldn't fer ther life o' me do it, an' *she—she*, Jane, my niece, come an' took ther gun from me —an' shot him—shot him herself, an' he fell there—there at ther thicket! 'Tain't 'nough thet he keeps on callin' ter whoever's there ter join him 'cause o' the lonesomeness—but—he comes *here* with his—white face—a-sayin' thet *he* knows things—*he*'ll set me behind sech bars!" went on the wild voice almost inaudibly, "how could we let him—live?"

No other sound stirred the room for a moment. Miss Belaire was pallid as death herself, but she shook her head when Mr. Whitney offered to take her down-stairs. Then they gave their attention again to this horrible confession given from dying lips.

"An' ther boy!" muttered the stiff lips presently, the wild eyes trying to search the room, the pallid face once more upon the pillow. "An' ther boy! *He* was al'ays a-snivelin' an' a-cryin' o' my treatment as though I hain't—a—right to do as—I will with—my help— But, good Lord!" again screamed the old man, starting up, struggling with the strong man who would hold him back upon the bed, fighting with a mad frenzy that made him the equal almost of this big, powerful man. "Good Lord! Hear him a-callin'—hear him a-callin' so pleasant like thet he was lonely an' fer us ter come along—o' him—an' walk together—"

He sank back under the strong hands upon him, and his voice died out in a gasping and gurgling struggling for the breath that was so swiftly fleeting away. The starting eyes were dimming, they could not recognize even the bare rafters of the old familiar room; the bony fingers were untwisted, and clutched, instead, the ragged covers about him.

"And what of the man who was charged with the murder? What of him, I say?" demanded

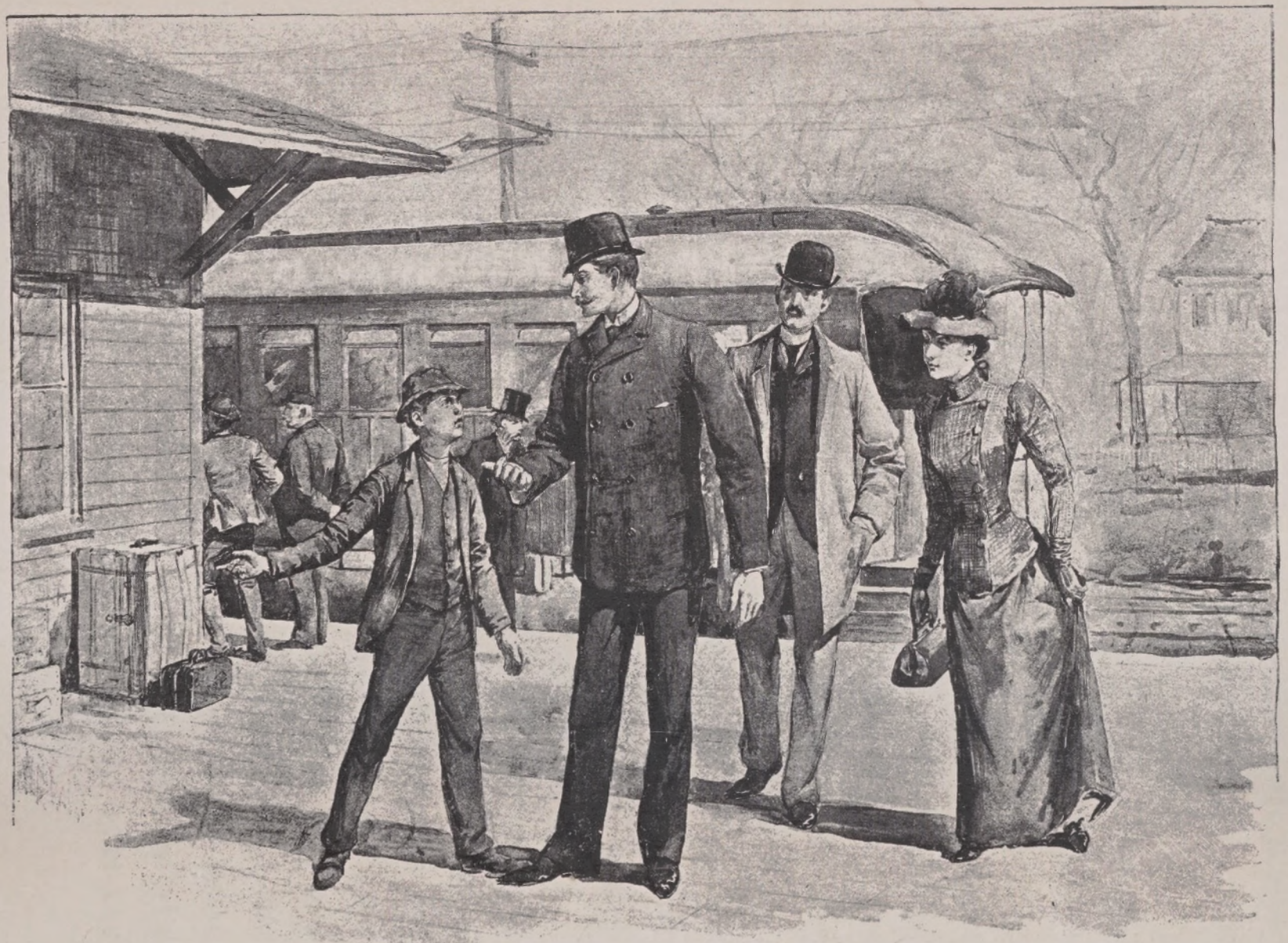
John King, stooping over this horrible, distorted face, and still speaking as slowly and distinctly as though to a child—but not a child surrounded with love or all good things—far from that! "You would have let them hang him for your deed, had the law allowed that! What of him, I ask you, Hardman—tell me that!"

The semblance of that old, shrewd, cunning expression crept upon the livid face, and the eyes, almost beyond seeing again the light that streamed so radiantly into the bare room, were raised to the bending face, that made but a blur upon the blank of coming darkness, as the shrill voice, faint and broken with this hideous struggle to still hold that mighty glass in his shriveled, bony fingers, muttered and mumbled inaudibly some reply, as though for the moment even consciousness of his own shrewdness had gone from him. Then, very swiftly, and without warning, the long, wild hands pushed aside those other detaining hands, as he struggled up in the hard, ragged bed, the ghastly face convulsed, and every last hint of blood in the horrible body sent into it by this one mad effort to speak.

Even the big, wrathful, stern man of justice shrank from him for the moment, as he cried shrilly:

"What o' him? What o' him? Ah! but it's let him—die—let him die—let him *die*, says old—Hardman! What—is it—to *me* who dies—if—*I* go—free! Ah! Ah! Good Lord!" once more broke off the faint voice in abject terror, the horrible form falling back upon the bed, its bony hands outspread vaguely to keep off the terrible Guest who had pushed ajar the door, and must enter in spite of resistance. "Lord! Lord! There he—is! Him—*him*—an' ther smile upon his face—ther smile upon his face—an' his eyes— Lord! Lord! Save me!"

Perhaps it was the first time in all his long life that such a cry crossed his lips, or those long, grasping hands lifted towards the heavens for mercy. But, in truth, there was need, if ever there would cross those thin, purple lips any cry for pardon, for the mighty Guest bent above the ghastly face, and laid its death-cold hand upon that convulsed face and shut out forever the beautiful sunlight, that would creep up over the



"I COMED FOR YOU," THE BOY SAID, QUICKLY.—*See Page* 214.

bare boards, over the bed's foot, up and up, across the ghastly hands, even resting in pity upon the distorted face.

And, murderer though she knew him to be in intention, if not in act—the wisher of her friend's death, the cause of Roy Hilton's clouded life—yet Kittie Belaire covered her sweet eyes with trembling hands and let the pitying tears come, while—who knows?—a silent prayer went up with this blood-stained soul to the merciful throne where there is no evading the justice that reigns supreme.

CHAPTER XXIV.

GONE.

And in spite of the bitter anger in his heart against this man for the willful wrong done Roy Hilton, Frank Whitney turned from the bedside to the woman shrinking from such a sight, and whatever of anger was in his heart died out looking in her pale, beautiful, merciful face, as he

held out his hands and led her from the room very kindly, very gravely, as though it were not meet for other words to be uttered after that wild cry for mercy from dying lips.

His hand was strong but gentle holding hers within it, and the brave, strong-hearted Kittie Belaire knew that this was a friend whom she could safely trust as she went with him down the steep, bare, creaking stairs to the still barer kitchen, over whose stove above crouched and shivered so many and many a time during the past winter—the last winter of his life! She smiled up at him through her tears and drew her hand from his very softly but steadily.

"I am quite myself now, Mr. Whitney," she said, in the soft, low, musical voice it was good for any one to hear. "I was so startled and—so sorry—"

If in truth she were herself—calm, self-controlled Kittie Belaire—why should these soft words tremble and break and stop short upon the quivering red mouth? At any rate the handsome lawyer considered it necessary to retain the small, soft hand in his as he placed a

chair for her near the stove—where but a faint trace of heat remained. The woman was not there.

"You are exhausted," he said, calmly, and with an authority rather pleasant than otherwise, glancing about the bare room. "You have followed out my wishes so well, Miss Kittie, that you have overtaxed yourself. But, thank Heaven, we were in time, and this deadly wrong may at last be righted—this terrible wrong that placed such a dark cloud upon as brave and true and noble a heart as was ever upon God's earth!"

"And his wife!" said Kittie softly, with a grave glance up into the handsome face above her. "It will be so good—so good for Helen to know!"

"You shall be the one to break the news to her, Miss Kittie," said Mr. Whitney, smiling, though there was upon both their faces the trace of an emotion not to be easily erased after that scene in the room overhead.

"But this woman?" she asked, presently, the deadened sound of footsteps in the room above

rather disheartening—remembering what had been there and was not now.

"Yes—the woman!" said Frank Whitney, with a start. "He implicated her to such an extent—laying the height of the crime upon her—that we must not let her escape. She came from the room some time ago. She must be somewhere hereabouts—"

But nowhere could they find her, though they searched the house through. From one room to another—each as bare and dreary as the others—but only the harsh vacancy of the rooms answered their low calling.

"And now we've settled *him*," said the hired man, John King, as he entered the kitchen some few minutes later, with his brother detectives and the boy. "Now that we've settled *him*, Mr. Whitney, we will attend to this charming woman who is the only one left upon whom to set the dogs of the law. And a mighty ticklish scent it's been, let me tell you—this, with this sharp old man and the still sharper woman, both willing to sell their last shred of soul for money. A mighty ticklish thing it's been!

And if it hadn't been for Tom, here—Tom, where are you, my lad—perhaps we'd have never made such a clear case as we have. But it's for the woman to bear it now, and it's her I'm after! Where is she, Mr. Whitney? Tom —you boys—Miss Belaire—*gone?* Lord! You don't say it? Phew!" The disconcerted man fell back a couple of steps, and his face was a mirror of blankness for a moment. Then he straightened himself, leaving the house almost before the others comprehended his intention.

"Yes, I'm going," he said, sententiously. "I don't give her up so easy as this! She's a she-devil if ever there was one, and she'll have to meet her fate! I wouldn't have let her go," he paused for a moment in the doorway to address his companions; "I wouldn't have had her go for all the money the old miser has been hiding with his sharp claws for these dozen years or so. No! I'd have let him go cheerfully in preference to her, if it'd had to be either way! And I'll run her down, sharp as she is!"

"Wait!" said Frank Whitney rising hurriedly, and detaining him by a hand upon his shoulder,

ere he vanished from the doorway. "Wait one moment, Cunningham! Who is the man who backed up these two villains you discovered working their plan against Mr. Hilton, and where are they? We must know that before you go!"

For an instant—and only for an instant—the man's face changed to one of fierce anger. Then he shrugged his shoulders, and in doing so, shook off the lawyer's detaining hand, and stepped from the doorway to the board beneath. His eyes went from one to another among them, and then lighted upon the boy. A slow, keen, remarkable smile stirred his lips, as he answered distinctly and slowly—as he spoke to the dying man: "I've no time to tell you—now. It's a long story. The lad there'll give you his name—maybe, if you ask! Eh, Tom, lad?" And with a chuckle of exultation he was gone into the wood, none of them quite knowing which direction he chose in his track of the woman who proved herself even more shrewd than he had believed her, and made good use of the half-hour's start.

CHAPTER XXV.

SUSPICION.

The house was terrible after the scene just enacted, and Frank Whitney, knowing that Miss Kittie Belaire was very unhappy during every moment of their stay, decided that he would go with her to the city, leaving the detectives in possession of the house, the body, and the two men whom John King, or Cunningham as he called him, had secured in the barn, as soon as he knew the old miser was dying.

Since that night when they met by agreement with the tall stranger at the Nyack depot, the new man—for he went by that name since he entered upon the life on the farm—bided his time for making sure of these men, also on the watch for some treachery toward himself, know-

ing that they understood his calling, and the cause of his coming for work to their master.

It was a pretty rough struggle for him to catch the two, for they were burly men, and more than equal to him in weight and muscles, but what he may have lacked in this he balanced by brain power; and feeling that the decisive moment was come, he called the boy to his assistance, and facing them as they were at work in the barn, ordered them to yield at the muzzle of his revolver. For John King was a wary man, and knew the value of such weapons.

He could never have taken them, however, without such aid, for they were desperate, knowing that their scheme for spoiling a man's character and earning gold through his enemy was discovered; but looking into the cold muzzle of the revolver, and being heartily assured that the first of them who stirred or attempted to escape should have the contents of one of the chambers into him, they could do no more than scowl darkly upon him and allow the boy to tie their hands and feet, this being the only

manner in which the detective could secure them at that time.

"There is no need for us to remain here longer, and I think you should return home, Miss Belaire," said Mr. Whitney, with his accustomed thoughtfulness for her comfort. "You men can hold this place until Cunningham returns, or until the proper authorities are notified of the man's death, and officers brought to arrest the men complicated in this affair. The boy here—Tom, I think?—will go to the village and report his master's death, and I will give him an order for police to come for these men. It is useless for us to remain. When Cunningham returns, whether successful or not, and I scarcely dare hope that he will be, send me on a dispatch at once. As to the man here, one of the murderers—"

The memory of that terrible death-scene where the old man, in his terror and delirium of death, betrayed his murderous deed and that of his niece, brought the swift pallor to Miss Kittie's cheeks; and her friend, always thoughtful, refrained from further mention of him.

And after preparing the police order for the boy, and speaking a few kindly words, his face very winning in its brave thought, he and Miss Belaire left the room and the house, leaving the saddle-horse for one of the other men, and entering the carriage, were driven back to Nyack, preferring that route to going to the depot at Nanuet, where he would probably be recognized.

"It was horrible! Horrible!" said Kittie; and Mr. Whitney considered it necessary that his hand should be upon hers, as they rolled back along the dreary road beside the wood in whose depths a noble life was ended. "If it were not that this must absolutely clear Mr. Hilton from the least hint of crime, I could find it in my heart to wish we had not come. See how selfish I am, Mr. Whitney."

She looked quite incapable of such a trait of character, and so, perhaps, thought Mr. Whitney, though he said nothing in reply, his smile down into her earnest, half-smiling, half-fearful eyes proving much more than his words.

"And to think," she added, presently, still more earnestly, a shadow falling across her face, "that the man who would have and has done his best against Helen and her husband, is—"

"And you have not mistrusted him before?" queried the lawyer, gravely, searching her face. "Even when we talked about him in the office one day, and you denied that he was your friend, you still held no suspicion of what he was doing to harm Roy Hilton and his wife?"

She shook her head.

"I have never liked him," she replied slowly. "I could never have trusted him; but that he would descend to such plotting and such associates—he, the handsome, wealthy—"

"Because a man is handsome and wealthy, is it impossible that he should do wrong?" asked her companion, with a quizzical flash in his eyes. "Money gives power, Miss Kittie, and an accomplished villain can do more harm through being able to work his plans with precision and skill, than a man who has neither money nor educa-

tion. I would prefer dealing with the two of these rough men than with him alone."

"Of course you know," said Miss Belaire positively; "you have enough experience, Mr., Whitney; but I could wish—if it were not for Mr. Hilton and his wife—that we had not come here. There is something so terrible about a man like—like this Hardman, to die with this—upon his soul—"

"You must forget it at once," said Mr. Whitney, with great authority. "It would have been better for you to have remained away from that room, Miss Kittie. But, of course, Cunningham and the other men did not think. They wished as many witnesses as they could obtain, and they did not stop to think of the effect of such a scene upon a sensitive mind and a generous heart."

"And shall you tell Mr. Hilton at once what we have discovered?" asked Miss Belaire, by and by, as they paced the station platform, waiting for the train. "It is such good news for him! How he must have suffered, and how *she* has suffered! I do not see how her people could

keep them apart even with this cloud upon his name. They might have trusted him enough to be certain he *could not* have murdered any one, especially a man he called his friend and hers!"

For a moment Frank Whitney was silent, and then he said very slowly and gravely, as though it were some difficult task he would perform:

"Miss Belaire, there are those outside of her family who have suspected Hilton—suspected him even against their will or the judgment of their hearts. During that illness of his—yes, even during his confinement before the trial—he uttered such strange words that even I—*I*, who should have been his warmest and truest friend—was forced at times to believe that in some moment of great passion he did take George Chesney's life. You know as well as I how jealousy has lived in his family always. You know how difficult it was for him to be certain that Mr. Chesney once loved his wife. You doubtless think me unkind and unjust; but, even so, I must acknowledge my weakness. He said once—and though that was during delirium, there was enough of truth in the possibility to

force me against my will to hold that there was some truth in the words—that he would hold as nothing any man's life who breathed insult against Helen. I tell you this to show you what a struggle I have had to remain true to my friendship. Even his wife had been forced at times—I could see it in her eyes, and her face, though she would have died rather than give utterance to the fact—to believe that he did commit that murder. It is through her strong desire to search every line and link in this chain that so strangely bound her husband, that we decided upon sending Cunningham to the farm to watch this man. There was something in his face and the face of his niece, when the trial was on, and the knowledge then given that Chesney was against him that first led us to suspect him. Chesney, as a partner in this law firm, knew, perhaps, more than he should of this man's dealings. There remained to be cleared the outcome of their quarrel, and the footprints following George, and we would not yield when often discouragements came."

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN PURSUIT.

John King, the detective, starting solely upon his knowledge of the woman he would overtake, struck upon the path that led through the woods and came out some half a mile from the station, in the busier portion of Nanuet. He had little proof to go upon as to her course, as the ground was hard, and her footprints could not be traced over the rough cart track and so through the wood; whereas, had she taken the public road, she could be easily traced.

He believed that she would make her way immediately to Nyack, where her uncle's lawyer was, and securing from him such an amount of money as she would need for present expenses, make her way to the city, and so either out of the

country altogether or into the far West, where it would be hard to follow. She was a shrewd woman and could think as rapidly as this hurried departure would necessitate. Were she only a trifle less sharp, a trifle less quick for emergencies, he would be more certain of overtaking and securing her. But he had no thought of yielding up the chase.

That she must pass the scene of the murder—yes, even come out on the very thicket where the dead man lay, he knew would not hinder her.

He cursed himself often enough, while hurrying on in this rough path, for his stupidity in not placing a watch over her; but it was apparently of no use, save to intensify his anger at himself and his determination to capture her if there were any means or any manner so to do. She was the worst of the two, he said to himself; she spurred the old man on to contemplate the deed, and it was *her* hand that at last ended the young man's life; she was a devil, not a woman!

"She's gone slow, I think," he said, presently, pausing to listen for any sound that might lead

him in the right direction. "She's gone slow or taken some other route, or there'd be some token of her having passed through here. She'd never get clear of these infernal briers otherwise. But if she has not come this way, in what direction *has* she gone? Never down the public road; of that I am positive. She would cut off her own head rather than be caught before the eyes of her neighbors. It's this way she came, I am certain. Hello!"

He stooped suddenly and carefully examined some marks at his feet, in the softer portion of the path, then he straightened up triumphantly and squared his shoulders, as he added slowly and distinctly:

"It's this way without a doubt, and if you don't catch up with her before night, Jack King, you're not the fellow I've always taken you for. She don't get free of Nyack—if that's where she's bound for—ere I have her. Oh, we'll meet again, Miss Jane, and I think you will go where I can find you if I should pine for a glimpse of your face!"

Lightened by the certainty that he was on the

right track, even though the woman was beyond doubt a good half-hour ahead of him, he plunged on into the bushes, regardless of torn clothing or torn hands and feet. That it was likely to be a difficult thing to come up with her he knew quite well; but with the determination to overtake her the man plunged along, stumbling, now catching his balance by a miracle of gymnastic exercise, now light-hearted at the certainty that he was upon her track, now plunged into despondency for fear she should catch some train ere he came up with her.

But, despite these hopes and fears, he crossed to the thicket where George Chesney had stood, calling upon some companionship, in the flush of his manhood, and striking into the depths of the wood on the other side, hurried on, determined to overtake her, if he should be forced to walk every step in his pursuit.

When he emerged into Nanuet, he saw with his keen eyes that everything was as unconcerned and as quiet as before murder crept into its peace.

Jane Hardman might have gone that way and

not been observed, he said to himself, but he would inquire, in a casual way, lest some friends of hers—if she could possess such—might warn her of his following. It was a long time ere he could find any one who saw her pass. Each and all were too occupied with their own affairs to note even that strange woman passing through the village. She seldom went from home, and it should be remarked when she did so. But these people cared too little for such a woman as her to note whether she were at home or abroad. Had they known upon what errand the hired man was bent, they might have roused from their calmness and helped him in the pursuit.

When he came to the platform at the station there was no one there but the station-master and a few idle loungers. He swept the platform and the waiting-room and every inch of space within sight with those keen eyes of his, and not a sight of the woman could he get. He glanced in at the big clock upon the blank white wall of the waiting-room, and started angrily back with a muttered exclamation.

He knew perfectly the arrival and departure of trains at this village, that he might be ready should there be need for him to know train time, and as he glanced at this big, stupid, white-faced clock ticking stolidly away upon the as stupid blank white wall, he could have knocked it down in his disgust and disappointment. For the train that he hoped to catch passed through some ten minutes before, and there would be no other for Nyack in four long hours. What should he do? Return to the house and give up the search, and declare it was impossible to follow the woman until these four hours were up?

No. That would not be Jack King. He set his lips very determinedly and somewhat desperately over those short white teeth of his; he shrugged his shoulders with apparent unconcern, and sauntering up to one of the men leaning against the window of the ticket-office, inquired of the station-master, a good-natured man, if he had seen old Hardman's niece go on the train just out. They wanted her up at the house, and as they could not find her there, and they knew she had thoughts of going on to Nyack, he had

come to catch her before she should go. But the train was gone, of course? Yes? He feared that. And the woman had gone upon it?

One or two of the idlers sauntered up to learn what old Hardman's new man could wish at the station, for he was little likely to have use for train time upon that straitened farm. They were a rough set; but there was good in them, too, if one could but get upon the right side of them. He learned this during his winter's stay in the village.

They liked him. He was pleasant-spoken, and could tell a good story with as lively a sense of humor as any man, and he could treat when he had the mind, for not a man there but was willing to "take a glass" at any time, if it happened to be at any other man's expense. So they liked him, and crowded about him to learn his errand, one of them catching his question, and rather curious to know what he could have to do with old Hardman's niece, and what old Hardman's niece could have to do with going off on the train.

He joked with them for a moment or so, know-

ing that so he could best win their good temper, and although he was intensely eager to be upon his way, he could, perhaps, afford to spare a moment in learning without doubt if the woman had gone. He took out a stick of tobacco which he carried for this purpose, for he never used it himself, and passed it around among them. Then, as carelessly as possible, as though it mattered not at all to him, he renewed his query regarding the woman. Did she go on the train? And was there no other under four hours for Nyack? They would not like it at the farm if he went back and reported that he could not detain her.

The station-master shifted one foot over the other and leaned his chin upon his hand in a thoughtful and very grave fashion. He eyed him for a moment with utter unconcern, and then, as he slowly and deliberately expectorated, and pulled his slouched hat lower over his face, he replied, slowly, that the woman had gone on that train—

"With two men," he added.

In spite of his self-control, John King started,

but covered his agitation with a shrug and a laugh.

"Eloped, eh?" he asked recklessly, to please their fancy; but as they laughed in their rough fashion over this joke of his, he muttered under his breath, with an added curse upon his carelessness:

"Gone, by Jove! And taken those two men with her!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

ON THE TRACK.

John King was a determined man. Perhaps he swore an oath or two over his own blindness and stupidity, in not having so placed watch over the woman as to prevent such an awkward occurrence, but John King was not the man to acknowledge to another his mistakes. It was his fashion to retrieve himself if he could; if not —but usually he could. He determined now the course he should follow in pursuing the

woman and her companions. He would get to the town as fast as the fastest horses could take him; and he decided, too, with that close-shutting of his lips over his white teeth, that this should be pretty fast if he held the reins. Nothing—certainly not horseflesh—should hinder his swift following! and John King knew enough about horses to be assured that he could trust a good team to make short time over the hard road between the village and the town.

He went to the livery stable at once, leaving the group of men and boys idly chatting over his conversation. He said little there; he knew whom he could trust and whom he could not. This man was bound to keep his secret if he took him into his confidence. Very few words he used in making known his errand, and a glance at a card he showed proved to the liveryman that it was to his interest to do his best.

The liveryman ordered out the lightest buggy in the place and the team of freshest horses; and then, not satisfied with this, went himself to see that they were put in, and everything secure for a wild race over the rough road. He showed

more excitement than the man with the keen eyes and the set mouth. He did his utmost for him, and earnestly wished the best of fortune in the chase for the miser's niece and the assistant in the terrible murder.

When the rig was ready, John King sprang into the buggy and caught up the reins, and, with a short word to the horses, went out of the stable-yard at a lively pace, though still keeping within such bounds as should rouse no surprise in the minds of the villagers. Once out of the place, his hold of the lines grew tense and steady, and the animals, recognizing a master behind them, set themselves for good hard work, and whirled him over the road at a pace they, perhaps, had never been called upon before to attempt.

Fences and barns and horses went reeling past like the swift changes in a kaleidoscope; the wheels spun round until the spokes ran round and blended mistily like the skein of a spider's web; there was no dust, but the rapid pace sent pebbles now and then flying from the

road-bed. The heads of the horses were down and their nerves well strung.

As they hurled along, their coats grew darker and darker with the sweat; foam flecked their mouths, but they were under the hands of a master, and knew their duty. And John King, the detective, the old miser's hired man, was whirled over this rough country road at a gait that stirred him even from his own grim thoughts.

No man with a trace of fondness for horse-flesh could ride as he was riding with those animals, and not feel the blood freshen in his veins. They were one with him, inasmuch as they were obedient to a word or touch upon the reins; there was a whip, but little need of its use. And this reckless riding not only stirred his blood, but renewed his courage; and he was certain, his eyes set between the ears of his flying horses, that he would be successful.

The woman must accomplish her errand to the lawyer ere she could work any plans, for he knew enough of her to be certain that she had

no money with her sufficient to take her away from the grasp of the law; and this she would be forced to make certain before she could go far in her flight. That she could make her demand very reasonable to the lawyer he had no doubt; for this woman whom he was following was still sharp enough to choose her words well when her safety was at stake.

He decided, going along, what course he should pursue should she have gotten clear of the town ere his arrival. The first thing for him was to make sure she did enter the town.

At the station he could assuredly learn if such a woman left the train, for she was a woman to impress any one with her appearance. Then he must go to old Hardman's lawyer, make his complaint and the charge against her, and learn what amount she secured, and if he possessed any clew as to her destination. After that—But he could decide upon nothing further until he knew that so far he was upon the right course.

He spoke to the horses sharply, and they

pricked their ears and stretched their necks and strained their every muscle to increase their speed. They were not particularly over-fed, and a good round meal might be acceptable to them; but they were willing and worked for this man as though they were from a stable where was given them the best of care and feeding. Better horses in their places, with better care and better blood in their veins, would undoubtedly have done speedier work at less loss to them; but these animals wer oing their best.

The road was rough and long, the steep hills much against them; but in very good time they struck the town outskirts and dashed down the hill and upon the main street, King pulling them in to a more sedate pace as they turned into the thicker portion of the town. The station was his first stopping-place, and there very particularly he made inquiries regarding the woman, describing her so accurately that no one having seen her could doubt her identity. But what was his disappointment at learning that, so far as any one there could tell, no such woman entered the town from any train that day.

From there, convinced that nothing was to be gained from the station hands, either because the woman had in truth not come there or because she bribed them to silence, he went on to the lawyer's office, in the heart of the town. Here he hoped to gain some clew upon which he might work; for he would not give up the search if he went the world over, his orders being to take her, and take her he would, knowing her guilt.

This lawyer of old Hardman's was known to Frank Whitney, and it was through his recommendation John King secured the position upon the Hardman farm. The two lawyers had never met, but the one knew of the other by reputation, and Mr. Whitney knew of this man as associated with the hard old man.

When John King left the panting horses in charge of a boy at the door, ordering him to see that they were blanketed and walked slowly up and down during his stay inside, he went up to the lawyer's office with an assurance, the office-boy declared, indignantly, afterward, as though he were a millionaire. He sent in his name and

a message that his business was peremptory, and when, perhaps, informed by the boy of his appearance, which was undoubtedly anything but reassuring, the lawyer refused to see him, offering the plea of being particularly engaged, this cool John King, with a shrug of his shoulders, ordered the boy to return to his master and inform him that he was sent by Mr. Whitney—Mr. Whitney, the lawyer—and that he must and would see him at once, and that he, refusing to see him, must bear the consequences.

And the yet more astonished boy did as he was bidden, scarcely knowing, himself, why he should obey the man. But when he returned, saying that his master would see him at once, this shrewd boy watched the man enter his master's office with such assurance, in spite of his appearance, he eyed him with unbounded amazement, and, perhaps, a trifle more respect.

But of this John King thought little. His mind was bent upon his errand, and the rapid transaction of such business as called him here. Every moment was precious. Every delay placed him so much behind in the accomplish-

ment of his errand. He knew his power over this man and entered his office with the quiet assurance of one possessed of such knowledge, although there was nothing aggressive or unmanly in his manner or appearance. Even under his rough clothing he proclaimed the gentleman.

"You wish to see me upon some important business relative to Mr. Whitney," said the lawyer, turning in his revolving-chair toward this strange visitor and eying him sharply from under his heavy brows.

"I wish to see you upon important business—yes," replied John King, calmly, not seating himself, as the lawyer motioned for him to do, but standing easily beside the desk, in his determination not to be hindered an instant longer than was necessary. "In one sense it is for Mr. Whitney, in another sense it is not."

His keen eyes were upon the other's lifted eyes. Both were shrewd men of the world. Both recognized that open dealing was best between them.

"You have a client, Josiah Hardman, who lived at Nanuet," said the detective, quietly.

The lawyer nodded. The shrewd expression in his eyes deepened.

"I have a client, Josiah Hardman, who lives at Nanuet, yes," he replied. "Why do you speak of him in the past tense?"

"Because the man is dead," replied John King, calmly. "Old Hardman died this morning. I was with him at the time—I, and two other detectives, and Mr. Whitney and a young lady—"

"You are a detective?" demanded the other, interrupting him with a trace of discomfort. "And how does it happen—"

"If you will have patience you shall hear in one moment what I have to say, and why I am here in this disguise," was the detective's cool reply. "Old Hardman, as I said, died this morning, in the presence of six witnesses. Before he died he made such confession as betrayed him and his niece, the murderers of your partner, for which Roy Hilton was charged. His niece being complicated in the affair, as I have said—in fact, the greater criminal of the two—I am

JOHN KING IN MR. WHITNEY'S OFFICE.—*See Page* 255.

upon her track. She came here this morning for money!"

The other shook his head, but a pallor was upon his face as though he realized the extent of this discovery; as though he feared what more this man might know.

"You are certain that she has not been here?" demanded the detective sternly, his eyes upon the agitated face of the lawyer. "Or, not coming herself, that she did not send—"

"Wait," interrupted the other, raising his hand for silence. He spoke hurriedly, but there was no doubt of his truth. Even this keen man with his eyes upon him could not doubt that. "She did not come here herself, no, but she sent—"

Keen appreciation of the situation flashed into those sharp eyes, and a light was upon the quiet face of the man standing at the desk.

"She sent one of their hired men with an order, eh? She is a shrewd woman, that Jane Hardman! But she will not escape. What was her excuse for sending for the money—"

"How do you know she did send for money?"

demanded the lawyer quickly, as though he would have been glad to deny the fact.

"Because I have common sense enough to be certain she could not go far without money," was the cool rejoinder. "What was her excuse for sending for it, and did she give you any hint of where she could be found by letter or otherwise if there were need?"

"No," the lawyer said, and the man watching him was assured that he told the truth, "She sent this man, a big, burly, rough fellow enough, with a note asking for a pretty large sum of money, saying as her reason for this, that she had a large bill to meet upon short demand, and must have it. It was plausible enough, and I sent the amount. As to where she is bound, I have no more idea than yourself. And *she*, then, committed that murder—and *he* is dead and she gone. Well, well, Mr. King, it's a strange world and stranger people in it! What will you do about the woman?"

"Follow her, of course," was the quiet reply, not a shade of turning upon the grave face. "I shall overtake her and the men before long. I

think I can trace them now. I am obliged to you for your information. Good morning, sir."

He turned from the room as quietly as he entered, and passed from the building with that exasperating air of being worth so much, according to the office boy's mind, and beckoning to the boy who was exercising the horses within sight of the entrance, he ordered them sent back to the stables in the village, giving the boy a pretty fair compensation for this work, and returned to the station determined to learn more of this big man who had so placed him off the scent.

Now, the station was a large one, and many trains with many passengers passed through there during the day. At first it was altogether impossible for him to gain the faintest information which he desired; but presently he came upon a man who had seen such a man leave the down train, yes, some hour or so earlier, and after some time the same man, or one after his image, boarded another train—one of the way trains that stopped at all the little stations—bound down also, if he remembered rightly.

At the ticket-office he inquired what tickets for way stations had been sold for the accommodation train ahead, and after some delay and considerable suspicion—until he showed his card bearing his true name and calling—he was told that seven tickets for stations had been sold for that train, and securing the names of each of these, he bought a ticket for the nearest for himself, and waited with such patience as he could command for the next train to follow upon this, that he might be upon his way.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON THE LAST CAR.

He was firmly convinced that the woman went on to some further station, either some way-station or to some large town, and was to wait there for her messenger for the money, when she would, in all probability, pay them off with a good price for silence—he knew the men well enough to be certain that they would demand

a good price for that—and they would then doubtless separate. If it were easier to trace the men than the women at first, he would do so, by that means, perhaps, gaining a clew that would lead to the ultimate finding of the woman.

Noon was past, so the detective, while waiting, ate a hearty meal in the station restaurant, knowing that it was impossible to foretell coming circumstances, and then resumed his promenade of the platform, smoking a cigar, and considering the matter from all points.

He did not have long to wait, for the train he was to take came down the track, and he boarded it, satisfied that again he was upon his way.

Way-trains stop longer at stations than an express, and he hoped to alight and make his inquiries and again board the train if the fugitives were gone on. Therefore, when the brakeman called out "Grand View," he was the first to leave the train, and, making his way to the porter, inquired of him if such passenger or passengers left the forward train there.

But if he expected immediate reply, he was doomed to disappointment, for, after glancing at

him in some astonishment, the man hurried away to offer his services to some one or two passengers who alighted after him, and John King, muttering an imprecation upon him and his stupidity, turned to the express-agent. No, this man knew of no such person or persons alighting at that station; but then he seldom *did* know of the passengers from trains; there was enough to do to attend to his business apart from that. Still undismayed, although the minutes were gone and the starting bell was ringing, John King made a last desperate attempt upon the station-master himself, whom he had been unable to detain when first alighting. This man, too, looked at him in some astonishment, but replied in the negative after slight hesitation. The train was going. With the bell clanging discordantly and the puff of steam suddenly silenced, the wheels began to turn and crawl over the tracks, quite unmindful that an agent of justice was frantically determined—under as quiet an exterior as though nothing out of the common had occurred—to learn what he desired, and also to catch that train, if he had to cling like a worm to

the rear rail of the last car. And from this man, too, he learned, rather crisply, but to the point, that no such person, to his certain knowledge, had come upon the platform at that station.

There was nothing about the man or in his manner of reply to waken suspicion of his truth; and John King, thinking of the one thing in his favor, dashed off a short dispatch to the next small station; this, with a bank-note into the man's hand, ordered him hurriedly to have it sent at once—*at once*, with stern emphasis upon these words; and then, with a run and a spring, he caught at a railing of the rear car, and, shouted at by the brakeman and the station-master for his daring, scrambled upon the steps and swung himself upon the platform, as the train, gathering speed, opened its iron throat in a wild scream, and dashed along the rails and around the curve out of sight of the staring station-master, ere he regained his senses enough to know what was expected of him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WHAT HE DISCOVERED.

The bank-note at any rate was a reality. Entering the station, the station agent at once sent the dispatch—a description of the man pursued, and the order to have ready upon the instant of the train's arrival any information as related to such a person; after which, he and the porter and the express-agent compared notes of the rough-looking, quiet-faced man who was so peremptory in his demand for their knowledge.

"It's a clear case o' runaway," said one of these men, in his slow certainty, after a silence during which each looked at the other for confirmation of their suspicions. "It's either that or some crime, take my word for it, boys."

And as it so happened that the "boys" in

question had no other alternative, they did, in truth, take his word for it.

When John King sprang from the train at the next station, his dispatch was received, and he met no such hinderance as before. It was a larger station and less likely to note its visitors, but he did well to telegraph his desire, for otherwise he must have lost the train in making inquiries. Nevertheless, no such person alighted from the train ahead.

Telegraphing on to the next stopping-place of the forward train to learn if such passenger or passengers were aboard, and detain them at Jersey City if they were, ordering, also, an answering dispatch to be at the next station for him, John King returned to the car not one whit less determined, and not having time to buy tickets, paid for his fare upon the train. So far he was doing well, and if there came back to him, at their next stop, the reply that no such person was aboard the train ahead, when it reached its next station, he would be assured that those whom he pursued were somewhere between those two points, and he would be upon the sharper look-

out for lying among the station hands. For the woman would not hesitate to spend money if it were necessary now, knowing that so she must save her life.

The general passenger carriage was suffocating and stupid, the detective muttered to himself; and, rising, he went on into the smoker to ease his mind and the better think out these problems with the aid of a quiet smoke.

Leaning back comfortably, puffing at his cigar, the detective's eyes were none the less keen than when he sat back there in the other carriage, and his mind was quite as clear; clearer, perhaps, soothed by this quieting weed.

He was a rougher passenger than usually entered that car, and the guard eyed him suspiciously for some time ere he came up to him, speaking in a low tone, and inquiring why he presented such an odd appearance. There was pretty good cause for the question, and John King, with a slight twinkle of the gray eyes, made no other reply than to close one of these eyes very slowly and expressively, and signify that handcuffs were in it, by swift but silent

gestures, and the guard, with an answering wink, queried, in a lower tone, if the "cove" were aboard? But when the detective made known his errand thus far, he saw no reason for entering into further particulars and merely shook his head.

"One of the sly ones, eh?" queried the guard, with a laugh and a shrug of his shoulders. "Few words, fewer risks, your motto?"

"No motto about it," replied the detective, calmly, puffing at his cigar and offering one to his companion. "It's the only safe way to keep one's business to one's self until there is need to make it known. You should have learned that sooner, my friend—"

He paused. Not a movement or change of expression betrayed him, but for the moment he was so thoroughly amazed that he found no words to express himself. It is doubtful, too, if he would have made his agitation known to his companion could he have done so. Breaking off in his remark as though it really were too much exertion to talk, and for no other reason, he smoked harder than ever—smoked so fiercely, in truth, that not a glimpse of his face could be

discernible through the wreaths about his head and face.

In one of the forward seats, in plain view of him as he leaned to one side, sat—the man for whom he was searching! No doubt of it. His hat was pulled over his face, and a villainous enough looking face it was in its blended stolidity and cunning; but this could not hide his identity from those watchful eyes in the rear seat.

"Shrewd—yes," he muttered between his teeth, his eyes straying from the burly figure lest his companion should fathom his thoughts. "More shrewd than I gave him credit for. They deserve that encomium. She set him on an *up* train from Nyack, and he took this train from one of the smaller stations beyond. Well worth my following—these scheming villains!"

Ready for this emergency as he was for any, in spite of its surprise, he drew from one of his inner pockets a red wig and mustache, and under the eyes of the guard, but unobserved by the other passengers, covered his identity so thoroughly with the aid of these that his own mother would never have recognized him, his

companion whispered, admiringly. And when the train stopped at the station he slipped very quietly out, but with his eyes alert for the possible alighting also of his burly friend, and ascertained that the dispatch was ready for him. Taking it from the operator he returned to the smoking-car, and, making sure that the man was still there, tore open the envelope to learn that—two of those persons described were upon the forward train, with tickets for New York! These two were the woman and the more quiet man, Jim.

"Oh, it's all very nice, my fine fellow!" muttered the detective, with grim satisfaction. "It's all very well, but when once you attempt alighting at Jersey City you will discover that your little game is up!"

In confirmation of which threat he alighted at the very next station—Tenafly—and sent a dispatch to the city for a couple of men to wait for those two passengers upon the forward train.

"Maybe they don't expect to be met at the station by anxious friends," muttered John King; "but they'll discover it in good time!"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE CLOUD LIFTING.

Roy Hilton, still but a ghost of his former self, sat in his wife's room in the handsome house upon the Avenue. He acquired the habit of sitting in this room, sometimes for hours together, reading nothing, doing nothing but thinking, forever thinking. And these thoughts of his were not pleasant thoughts; and every day of this strange, lonely, dreaming life, added years to his appearance. He was no longer light of heart, or swift with the smile that won for him so many friends in the old free days.

It was always of George Chesney at his best that he thought, whenever that dark crime rose before him. Fever left him with a weakness of the brain that could not lift under this added

sorrow, and he grew sometimes very hard with himself, wondering whether or no it were his hand that had taken Chesney's life in that fit of insane jealousy, or whether it were strange evil of fate that laid upon him, at the height of his happiness, the touch of crime. And always, at such times and at all, his one greatest thought was for his wife.

The physicians said, when he was slowly recovering and this strange imagination of the brain remained, that he would undoubtedly recover when the cause was removed, but not until then. And with his friends this meant, perhaps, forever; for few knew of the struggle his wife and Frank Whitney were undertaking to prove that no hint of guilt could touch the quiet man, shut in his lonely life, seeing few of the many friends who called daily to learn of his condition and left tokens of their thoughtfulness in flowers and fruit to tempt his thoughts to lighter things. And out of all these gifts there was one that came as promptly as the day dawned, and which he knew would come, with a certainty pathetic in its very eagerness—an exquisite bouquet of

white roses and forget-me-nots and lilies of the valley—always the same, always from the same source, he knew.

And if the sender could have seen how he laid his thin face among their blossoms and whispered—foolishly, perhaps—of Helen and her brave heart, her grave, proud face growing daily more white and thin, might have taken on a deeper sadness. But no eyes ever saw this weakness in him. He was quiet and still and very grave in the presence of others, but the same proud man who won his wife from them all.

Everything was still in the house—strangely still, it seemed to him, suddenly waking to the fact, and he started and touched the bell beside him. Nothing had happened—nothing, was the reply given when his call was answered. Was there anything he desired? Water, perhaps, or wine, or a little something to eat? Nothing, he answered to them all, and sank down again to watch the flowers and to think.

And then—was it immediately after that, or had hours gone past?—he did not know.

There was a light tap upon his door, and Frank Whitney entered.

He smiled upon him when he knew who it was; but the smile was so full of sadness and the bravery of a soul that would not yield to its weight of sorrow, that this friend turned his face aside for an instant that it should not meet his eyes. Then he crossed the soft carpet and held out his hand. There was something so quiet and contented about this simple gesture that the younger man—younger in years but ages older in sorrow—did not take the hand at once, but leaned back among his cushions, a new pallor striking his face, his eyes searching the quiet face above him.

"I am foolishly weak to-day, Whitney," he said, slowly, his eyes never leaving his friend's face. "You will bear with me—you will always bear with my weaknesses!"

Again that slow, sad, infinitely sad smile.

"It seemed to me, as I looked at you, that something was in your face—something that has not been there these many days—ay, months for

that matter! But I am weak still, and you know the dreaming of idle minds!"

Frank Whitney smiled down into those searching eyes, and held in his for a long minute the hand of his friend. He stood beside him, too, rather aimlessly. He had been here every day when it was possible during the long winter of trial, and yet never before was he so possessed with this feeling of restraint. Even his eyes could not long rest upon those steady, searching, lifted blue eyes looking out from that pale, proud face. Unconsciously his gaze strayed to the flowers upon the stand beside his friend.

"How beautiful they are!" he said, with no special forethought. "An emblem of the sender—"

Then he bit his lip. He did not know how his friend would take such a remark bearing upon something that he held almost his own by right of the tie between himself and the beautiful woman whose white hands arranged them, whose proud lips may have been—who knows?

—pressed upon the spotless petals ere they went upon their errand of love!

He caught the flash in the steady eyes shining out of that proud face upon the cushions, and turning away, walked to the window, still in that aimless, restless fashion so new to him, self-possessed man as he was.

Those steady eyes noted this strange restlessness, and Roy asked, after a moment of utter silence:

"What is it, Frank? You have something to tell me. You need not try to hide it. Tell me at once. No matter what it is, I can bear it—anything!"

Frank Whitney stopped instantly, catching this low, excited voice. He turned, and Roy had half risen from his chair—for Roy was still so weak he scarcely ever left this chair for long—and crossing to him, pressed him back in the chair with his kind hands upon his shoulders, a smile upon his face. He would have spoken, but at that moment he heard the fall of light feet in the hall, and, facing the door, he saw it open, and then— But he knew what was to come, and

turned away to give room to the woman who entered, who had a right to enter, who had supreme right to the place beside the proud, startled man in her chair beside the window in her room.

"Helen!" he tried to articulate, but the power of voice was gone for the moment, and he could but reach out his arms to her, those marvelous eyes upon her face with a wild light of blended questioning, fear and love, and then—they were alone, and she was pouring out her heart in incoherent whisperings, once more kneeling beside him, his arms about her, her face more beautiful than ever; that proud, sweet face had been, as it lay, quite hidden from any other eyes but his, upon his shoulder.

"Is it true?" he whispered, by and by, when he could find voice. "You said we must never meet again, Helen, until—until I was proved innocent beyond even the doubt of my worst enemy; and yet you are here—"

"And it *is* proved," she whispered, as softly and as tenderly, not moving from her resting

place. "The cloud has been cleared utterly away, and my husband rises out of it a new man a brave, true, noble, wonderful—oh, a wonderful man to me, indeed—to me, his wife!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

A TRAITOROUS FRIEND.

A quiet-appearing man walked up the steps and rang the bell at the Stuart house upon the Avenue the next morning. He was plainly but well dressed, and had the air of one accustomed to being obeyed. When the footman demurred at his demand to be taken to Mr. Hilton, he silenced the man by the simple statement that he was expected and must be shown up at once. And although still unconvinced, the man obeyed.

Frank Whitney, who was in the room with Roy and his wife, Mr. Stuart and Helen's mother and Miss Kittie Belaire, stepped forward upon his entrance, and smiling, introduced him to those present.

"Mr. Cunningham, otherwise known as John King, and still better known as old Hardman's hired man, in Nanuet," he said. "It is to him we owe this happiness, Hilton. He has worked like a beaver to obtain the truth, but he gained it like a man. You must allow me to congratulate you, Cunningham."

Mr. Cunningham bowed. He was as self-possessed as when chasing the fugitives along the railway; but this was another affair. Then, too, he had not finished his work, and until that was accomplished he could not yield his professional sternness.

"You know why I am here, Mr. Whitney," he said. He addressed Frank Whitney because they transacted all this business together. "We have succeeded so far well enough, but there is the other still to do."

"Yes," said Frank Whitney, quickly, "I know, Cunningham. The only thing against it is that Mrs. Hilton has been waiting for a full half-hour to keep her engagement to drive with him. It begins to look as though he was not coming. Perhaps he has heard of this. You caught the

woman and the men? They were secured at Jersey City."

"The woman and one of the men," replied the detective, particular as to facts. "One of the men, you remember, was on the train with me and *I* took *him*. But they are all pretty safe at present, excepting this other one.

"Yes," said Mr. Whitney, decisively. "Well, what is to be done with this other one, Cunningham? He was to be here a half-hour ago. He could not have learned of the old man's death, because we took good care it should not get into the papers until we were sure of them all. These confederates of his could not have warned him, because they had no opportunity—"

"Unless they did so during the time they were free upon the road," suggested the detective, quietly, a gleam in his eyes.

"By Jove—yes!" exclaimed Mr. Whitney, in more excitement than he usually indulged. "Why didn't we think of that before? They could have easily telegraphed him at any station. No one has seen him since that happened. He

was not at the club last night, or *anywhere*, so far as I know!"

"And he was to have taken Ninette Silverham to Mrs. Courtney's *conversazione*," said Helen. "It was Mrs. Courtney's last entertainment for the season, as they start for Europe next week, and it isn't like him to fail in such a matter. Nevertheless, I shall be glad if he is gone," she added, stoutly. She moved to one of the windows facing the street, where Kittie Belaire was standing, and her husband sat at her other side. "I am *glad* if he has gone, Frank! If he knows of this, his conscience and the thought of his disgrace are punishment enough! Let him go, if not for his own sake, at least for his mother's. She is a lovely woman."

CHAPTER XXXII.

"LET HIM GO!"

"I say, too, let him go," said Hilton, very quietly.

"But it is the law, Mr. Hilton," said the detective, sturdily. "The man hasn't any right to go clear! He's made himself liable for bribery and blackmail, and it would do *me* considerable good to punish him for it. Even if he is one of those wealthy young fellows about town, he has no right to bribe men to hurt other men's characters! And as he did this thing—we've got the very men whom he bribed, and know all about it!—he ought to suffer for it. It wouldn't hurt him much."

Frank Whitney laughed.

"That is what I say, Cunningham! I'm none

too soft-hearted toward him, when I think what he has done and would do now, no doubt, did he not know he has been discovered! I wish he would come, or that we could know what he has done."

"We might send to his house and inquire," suggested the detective, with an impatient frown. It was all very well for women to wish the man away, but for his part, he would much rather have him punished.

This suggestion was acted upon at once. A messenger-boy was summoned and sent with a note to his house. He was to wait for a reply. It was full a half-hour after the time appointed for the engagement. They could have little hope of his keeping it. It was pretty clear that the man they wished to see—that two out of the group would give considerable to see—had escaped punishment, and gone, perhaps, the width of the world apart from them!

"He could so easily have secured passage out on some one of the steamers either yesterday or to-day, or even have started for San Francisco to sail from there," said Frank Whitney, discontent-

edly. He was walking to and fro with his hands behind him and a frown upon his face.

"We can still telegraph to all ports and make sure," suggested Cunningham.

"No," said Roy, and he said it with his old decided manner. His old manner was slowly returning to him with this new happiness although it would take months to bring back his health and appearance. "If he has gone, let him go. We will not have him traced. If he does not come here, he may go where he will; I am content."

"And so am I," said his wife, softly. She let Miss Kittie's hand fall and laid hers upon his shoulder very gently. She was so proud of her husband! "Even father says he would not have the man punished, if for no other reason than for the added scandal. You know we talked of that last evening; father here remembers;" and she smiled across at the stern man at the table.

"Still," said Frank Whitney, laughing, as he crossed over to Miss Kittie's side—she was sitting a little apart from the others and looked remarkably graceful and pretty—"still, Mrs.

Hilton, it isn't quite safe to take part with any one so clearly outraging the law when one of the law's agents is present! You make yourself accessory to the deed by wishing to shield him—"

"I'm not shielding him," said Helen, smiling. "But we have had enough of courts and law for a long, long while, and we will be much happier when we have done with them. We owe you so much, Mr. Cunningham, this sounds like treason; but it is the other side of the law I mean that we would be rid of!"

"And there are so many strange turns and twists in the law," said Miss Kittie, with remarkable gravity. She was leaning back in her chair, and Mr. Whitney stood beside her, so that her face was within his view. She was very daring in her remarks, too, with her employer beside her.

"After all," said this quiet lawyer, with a flash of laughter in his eyes, still looking down into those dark eyes, "after all, who knows but our charming friend may come in upon us in spite of our hopes and fears? We have no certain knowl-

edge that he has gone; and I warn you, Miss Kittie, if he does come within our reach he will have as great abhorrence of the law as even you could have, professed to be such a devoted admirer of it as you are, away from this room."

"But I *have* to make believe I am deeply interested in it," she said, wickedly—there was a nervousness upon them all, although they talked so eagerly and would not let silence fall upon the room—"because it is the only way I can earn my living, Mr. Whitney."

Was she teasing him again? He frowned and bit his lip; but she still looked very cool and innocent, leaning back among the puffy blue cushions, and, manlike, he could not determine whether he were angry or pleased with this tormenting woman.

Whether there would have followed any argument upon this subject no one can say, for at that moment the footman announced the messenger returned, with the message that there was no reply—

"Mr. Neil Carlton having gone abroad."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ANOTHER TRIAL.

Once more, from floor to gallery, the court room was crowded; but this time the sea of faces, the rows of windows with their dingy panes, and the low spring winds, were turned upon another face in the prisoner's dock—a woman's face. Not one touch of stain rested longer on the fair fame and upright character and proud blood of Roy Hilton. Every whisper, when of him, was to his good. He had started to come up with Chesney, to take back his bitter words, fighting down that mad passion that would have ruined his life had he allowed; but missing him, came out upon the cart-track scarcely ten minutes after the terrible crime was committed, and hastened to the village, still in hopes of overtak-

ing Chesney, still fighting the demon in his heart that struggled for mastery.

Again this crowd surged and breathed revengefully, and still sat in utter silence through the trial. Roy Hilton was there and his beautiful young wife, no veil hiding her exquisite face from the gaze of the crowd; and Miss Kittie and Mr. Whitney, and Graham and Manning and the others of that hunting-party. John King was there, of course, and the boy. Poor Tom Day had friends now whom he might never have had but for these strange turnings of the wheel of fortune. For Roy Hilton took him from the dreary farm and into his own home.

The presentation of the case for prosecution was clear, and the evidence tightening more and more about those fine, unyielding webs of steel about the prisoner's hands.

The counsel stated the case for defense in a few words when it came to summing up the evidence. There was so little that could be said unless he chose to talk on aimlessly, and that he knew the crowd would never bear if the court would. And how startlingly strong was the

summing up of the evidence for prosecution! They feared George Chesney, because he knew too much of their mode of securing the money they loved. He knew, as partner of this Hardman's lawyer, of transactions that would have placed them behind prison bars if he had whispered them against them. The farm he declared was so heavily mortgaged—of which he held the mortgage—was clear of debt, but through his shrewdness and his daring he had such papers as were necessary to give him the hold he needed upon this prosperous farm, and he took the boy—whether because of some slight prick of conscience, or because he feared to have him beyond his reach, who knew?—and no one dared question his right, knowing what manner of man he was.

And his lawyer was very shrewd, too! That lawyer in the town. He drew up the papers for a "consideration," and they were signed by witnesses, and that was all that was needed with the forged signature upon them, and so the farm passed into this miser's hands, and the boy was

MISS KITTIE BELAIRE, SMILING, INTRODUCED HIM.—*See Page* 277.

defrauded and given a home where a home should have been given, indeed!

And this wise lawyer was missing, too, when he was wanted; not a trace did he leave whereby to follow him. And there were other things as hard against the miser which George Chesney could tell if he would, for he was a keen business man, and as unyielding as a stone where honor was questioned. And so it had come about that they would be rid of this troublesome lawyer, and they sent for him upon "important business," and he threatened them with exposure and they followed him through the woods—the old man and his niece—he waiting in the thicket with his rifle, well-assured that a rifle shot would attract no attention—the woods being a hunting-ground—and the woman creeping stealthily along the thicket keeping watch.

And when the old man, softened by the pleasant face and pleasant voice calling for companionship, would have let his enemy go unharmed, this woman would not have it so. When he faltered, and the instant for the deed had almost passed without its occurrence, even lowering

the rifle and shrinking back among the rough briers and scrubby bushes—then she, this woman, sprang to his side, tore the rifle from the old man's trembling hands, and sent the ball herself that ended Chesney's life.

All this was witnessed by the boy, who followed the man and the woman—drawn by some subtle attraction—who hid himself in the underbrush and waited what must come. He did not realize that this was murder upon which they were bent, and when his horrified eyes saw the deed, he did not dare to stir or cry out from fear. And afterward he saw Roy Hilton come out through the thicket unconscious of the terrible crime, and then he stole away with this terror on his mind, and had not dared breathe it until it was told the detective. And so the boy they had so wronged by fraud and greed, turned upon them and convicted them.

And then there was a slight stir throughout this vast crowd. The jury returned. They gave their verdict. Each in his turn replied in one word what his decision was upon the

prisoner. Guilty! The silence of death fell over the crowd. The judge was passing sentence upon the prisoner:

"To be hung by the neck until you are dead."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SUNLIGHT.

Fourteen months, and it was the heart of summer. The mountains were very peaceful with the hush of nature over them. The water was shadowed by their mighty forms pressing so close upon the edge. Out toward the middle of the lake the blue heavens were reflected deeper in color, with more mystical clouds floating across it than overhead. The cry of a bird now and then fell musically through this silence, and again the murmur of soft laughter and voices telling of happy hearts, was borne along upon the faint breeze that stole down between the pines, like a messenger of dryads hidden in the dim woods.

A group of young people were on the hotel piazza overlooking the lake —a group of young men, good-looking and good-natured, as though the world were running pretty smoothly through the quiet of the mountains—as it should run—this old world—with those sturdy hearts ready to meet it with the gentler hearts of their companions.

"Where is Helen?" asked a sweet young girl, arranging her pretty gown of pale blue so that the merest tip of a tiny slipper peeped into view, as she sat on the upper step of the piazza, recklessly unconscious that a pair of handsome masculine eyes were upon her piquant face. "Where is Helen? She has been invisible the whole day, and you all know that I am inconsolable without my beauty."

"Helen is out upon the lake with her husband, Carlie," answered another bright feminine voice. The girl who spoke was nearly invisible in the great bamboo chair with its cushions. There was a light fall of silk of pallid gold glimmering from that to the piazza floor and around the tiny feet crossed so artlessly, and a slim

white hand was lying with careless grace upon one of the red cushions.

The Babel of pretty voices, the confusion of masculine tones intermingled, hinting of bright eyes and light hearts, drifted down to the quiet lake, where at that moment, out from the shadow of the trees near the bank, a couple of canoes came lightly, floating like the dainty film of clouds upon the blue heaven above.

The paddles just stirred the surface of the lake into faint ripples that widened and widened into long curves of dancing sparkles and flecks of jet, as though the light of the upper world and the shadow of the lake's heart were struggling for mastery, and only peace could conquer when the ripples died.

Two canoes, the paddles in each managed by young men—handsome, light-hearted, showing that the world went well with them and nothing but such ripples as struck the lake's surface could mar their peace. But two young men would not be so gay and light of heart and happy, paddling by themselves even upon such a lake as that. And two young men—or one

young man—could never possess such a musical voice as the one chiming very sweetly along with the breeze in dainty song. And then two young men could never picture such evident realities as the charming young woman in the stern of each canoe! And no picturing could rival the brightness and the pleasantness of the realities sitting so easily and gracefully before them!

"Oh, it's very nice, very nice, indeed!" said one of these bright realities, with a soft laugh upon her red lips and the lashes obstinately hiding the dark-gray eyes as one small hand went trailing along the water where the lights and shadows were so magically blended. "It couldn't be more perfect if it tried—this day! I think I should like"—how very distinctly and tantalizingly she uttered the words!—"I think I should like very much to bring out all those dreadful law books and sink them down, down, down, with due solemnity, into the bottomless depths of this lake, Frank Whitney! They could not find a more fitting grave! Perhaps

then you could bear to have me say that I am tired—"

"Not of me?" interrupted her companion, quickly. "You would not be so cruel as that, Kittie."

Still he never knew what this young woman was likely to say.

"W–e–ll," said Miss Kittie, with a deep sigh, and she took her hand from the water and wiped it very sedately and carefully upon a dainty film of handkerchief, "it is pretty difficult to decide upon *that* at such short notice, Frank Whitney. What I really wished to say is—if you would only not interrupt me so often—that I am tired of being cross any longer, and—maybe—"

"Oh, I see!" said the young man, with sudden smiling upon his lips. "For that I will forgive you any other unkindness you may have offered me, Kittie Belaire. And in return I shall ask you—"

"No; don't!" protested Miss Kittie, with great haste, turning her eyes away from the light in his. "Helen and her husband are coming this

way—and—and the piazza is in full view—and it is just as nice—by moonlight—"

"Well!" retorted the young man, dipping the paddle very deliberately in the shining water, his eyes upon the turned, eloquent face. "You are the strangest little bit of womanhood I ever came across, Kittie Belaire. But the moonlight and the piazza may be more appropriate for what I have to say than the open lake, especially as Hilton and his wife *are* coming."

At that moment, the other canoe came in sight again; they started different ways; and the soft drift of song from the beautiful lips of the woman at the stern blended too musically upon the tender air for further harsh words of any lover's quarrel.

"There is no place in all the world like Loon Lake for mystery," declared this beautiful woman, as the two canoes glided side by side and drifted on over the exquisite surface, as though there were not anywhere in the wide world, indeed, any place of disquiet or the struggle for life.

"And no one in the world who looks so charm-

ing upon it," added Miss Kittie, with a soft touch of laughter in her voice, though her friends knew quite well the depth of her sincerity and admiration for this friend of hers. "If it were possible for me to be more jealous than I am at this minute, I should think the fates might have made me more like yourself, Helen. I don't wonder poor Tom adores you, or," again that wicked hint of more than was uttered in her soft voice—"or the perfect belief your husband has in you."

"If I did not believe in my wife," said Roy, and he was once more the bronzed-faced, handsome, agreeable man of old, though still there was a gravity upon him that his trial must leave upon him, being the man he was—"if I did not believe in my wife, I would forever blush for my lack of manliness, Miss Kittie. There is no other woman in the world like her."

"Plenty of them, Roy," said his wife, laughing; but the eyes meeting his were sweet with pleasure at his praise. "You have never looked for them or you would have had no trouble to discover many."

"But, then, they would not be your wife,"

interposed Miss Kittie, calmly. "That makes so much difference, Helen, dear."

"And Roy being my husband," said Helen, laughing, "of course, I have the utmost faith in him and his belief—every one has—every one, now."

"And always," added Frank Whitney, quietly; but he could not meet Miss Kittie's eyes as he said this, for he remembered the confession he made to her of his distrust of his friend when most he was tried. But Miss Kittie was not the woman to repeat such words—ever.

"Ask Tom, if you doubt it," added Miss Kittie, merrily, with a dash of her hand into the cool surface of the quiet lake. "Ask Tom."

"And the two men who were let off so easily at the trial through his intercession," added the lawyer, gravely.

"Ask any one," continued Helen, very softly, her shining eyes upon her husband's face. "Ask my father; ask his friends—any one."

"And so, with such friends as this," said Roy, gently, a smile in his eyes, though his voice was grave, and there was a deepening of the new

expression that had come upon his face since that trial, "and so even that dark cloud that hid for so long the sunlight has drifted quite away, and happiness has returned to my wife—and me."

"And your friends through you," said Frank Whitney, smiling. "And even the evil wish of that traitorous friend who would have spoiled your life, could not harm you—or your wife."

"No," said Roy, gravely, his eyes straying to the solemn mountains, where the shadows of falling twilight were deepening. "No; I am glad he went away, and that we let him go. Wherever he is, I wish him no harm. I have but one regret, and that is that George left me with my harsh words in his heart. He was such a noble fellow."

"The humiliation of the defeat was enough for Neil Carleton," said Helen, after a moment's pause, her eyes, too, following her husband's over the stretch of mysterious lake to the towering depths of the water. "I wish him no harm, either. And I think—I am sure, Roy—that George knows. If peace could fall upon all the

world as it has fallen upon us, it would be my greatest wish that it should be over evil and good, over just and unjust—over all."

"That wish is like you," said Kittie, softly; and there was a glimmer as of tears in her eyes, but she turned them down upon the shadowed lake, that none should know. "Like you—and your husband, Helen Hilton."

And the ripple of the water against the prow of the canoes as they glided on toward the shore, was like the faint echo of the wish from the mysteries of the great lake where no sunlight ever fathomed the darkness.

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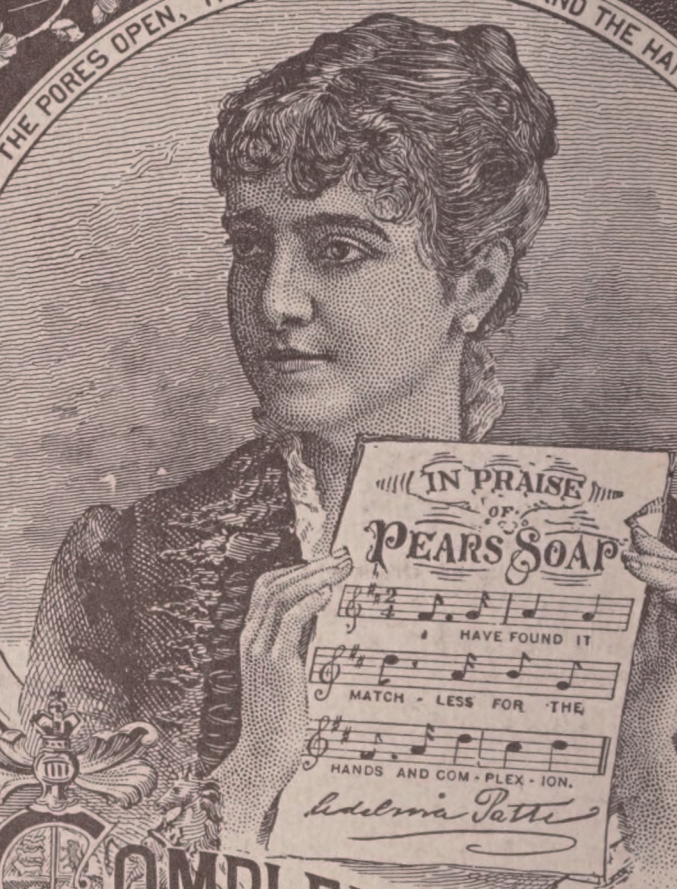

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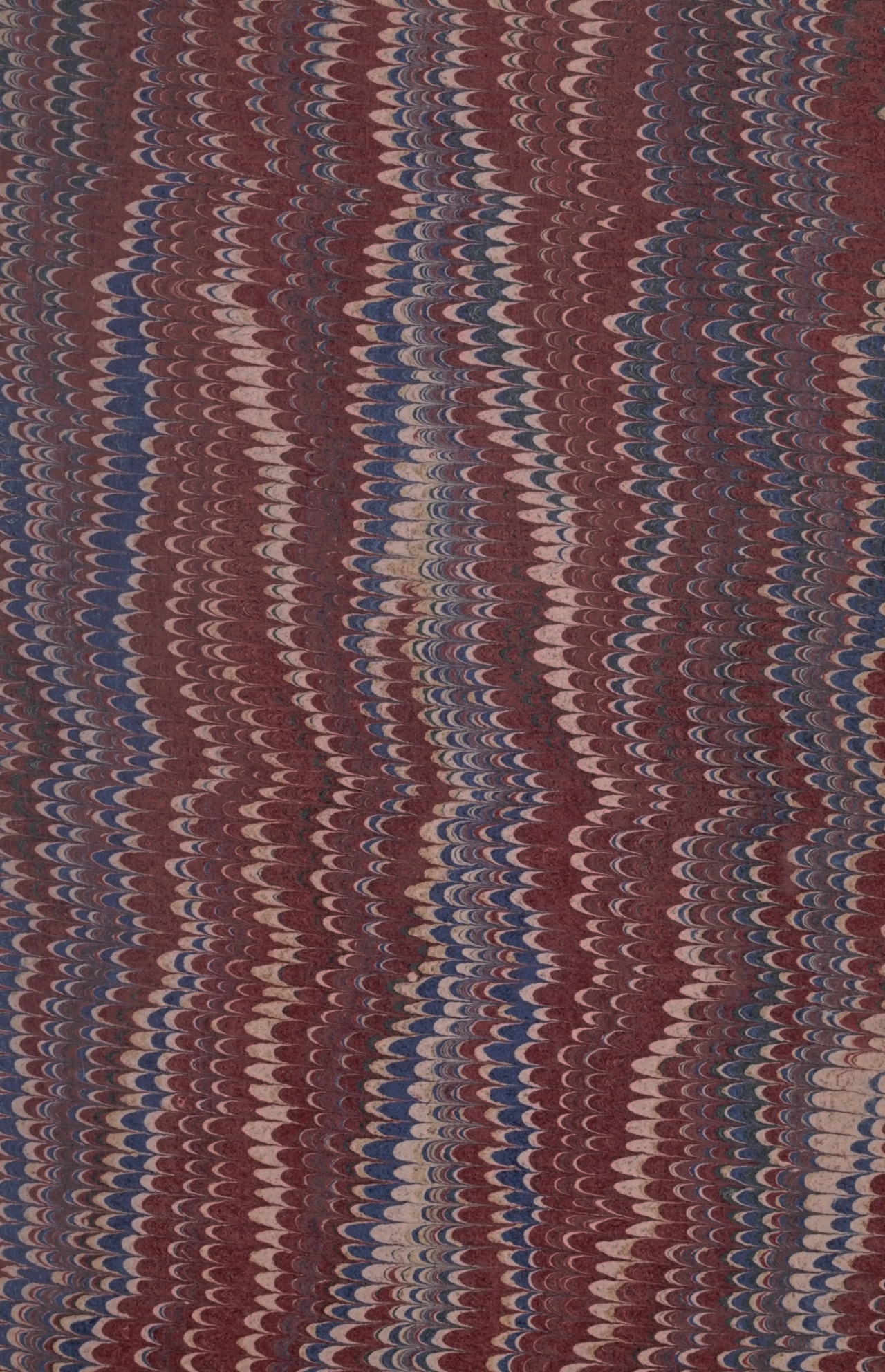

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